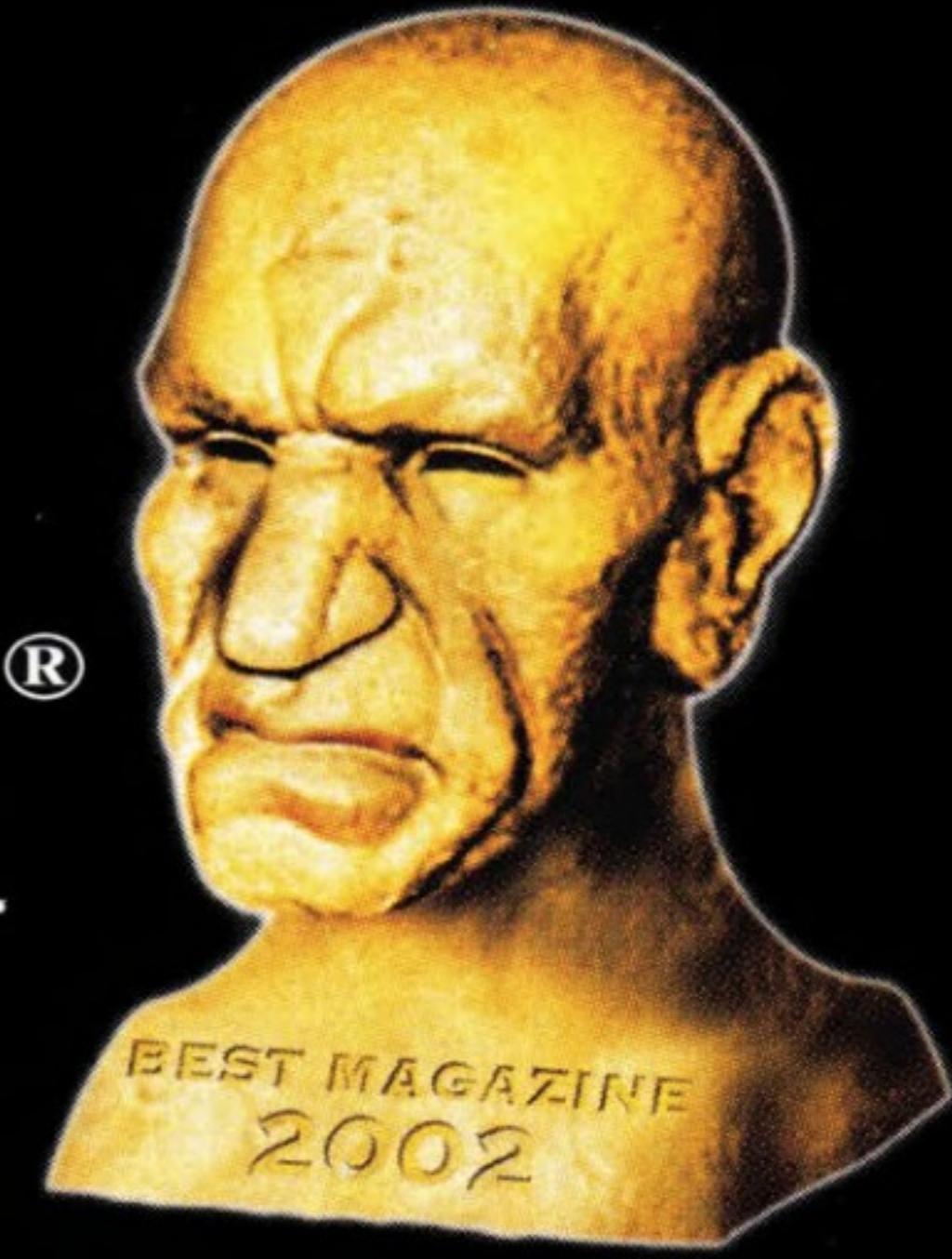


Video Watchdog®



No. 93

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CURSE OF THE DEMON

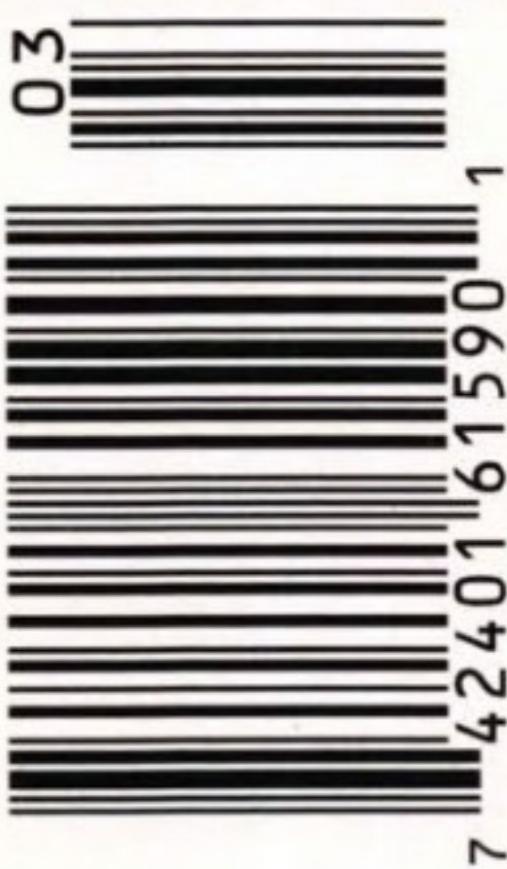
Two Versions Compared!

Joe Dante on '70s Sci-Fi!

Gremlins! Herzog! Harryhausen!

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Video Watchdog®

the Perfectionist's
Guide to
Fantastic Video

No. 93 / MAR 2003

"The more opinions you have, the less you see."

—Wim Wenders

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By Popular Demand! You've wondered what it would be like to read a "duelling critics" assessment of a new DVD release, so here it is! UK critic Kim Newman and US critic Bill Cooke are actually in agreement about Columbia TriStar's new DVD of the Jacques Tourneur classic, but they manage to say some very different things about it! Includes a breakdown of all the changes made to the original **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** cut, which is also included on the DVD!

Front: Charlie Largent's flaming rendition of Prof. Karswell (Niall McGinness) and his pet from Jacques Tourneur's **CURSE OF THE DEMON** (1957), now available from Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment.

Inside: Zach Galligan and Gizmo take a breather by comforting one another during a brief respite from the zany horrors of **GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH** (1990), available on DVD from Warner Home Video.

Back: Joe Dante encounters a long-lost friend (or foe?) at Wonderfest in Louisville, KY, May 2002.

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KENNEL

JOHN CHARLES wrote the liner notes for Image Entertainment's upcoming DVD release of **RAIDERS OF THE LIVING DEAD**.

BILL COOKE recently recreated (with limitations) the 1950s drive-in experience for students at USC, South Carolina.

SHANE M. DALLMANN has now completed three seasons as horror host of his public access series **MANOR OF MAYHEM**.

JOE DANTE can be seen interviewing the God-father of Stop Motion Animation on Columbia TriStar's "Ray Harryhausen Signature Collection" DVDs.

CHARLIE LARGENT provided the cover art for the next CD release by Meat Loaf.

TIM LUCAS, by the time you read this, should have finished editing the 1200-page, single-spaced typescript of **MARIO BAVA—ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK**.

VW THANKS:

Anchor Bay Entertainment (Perry Martin, Maral Kaloustian/Sue Procko PR), Blue Underground (Bill Lustig, David Gregory), Juanita Bowman, Carl Samrock Public Relations (Tara Conrad), Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment (Kavita Smith), Criterion (R. O'Donnell), Glittering Images (Stefano Piselli), Image Entertainment (Spencer Savage), Sanney Leung, Manga Video, McFarland and Company, Michael Wiese Productions (Ken Lee), Paramount Home Entertainment, Replay Home Entertainment, Retromedia Entertainment (Steve Latshaw), Salvation Films, Something Weird Video (Mike Vraney, Lisa Petrucci), Synapse Films (Don May, Jr., Jerry Chandler), Tai Seng Entertainment (Frank Djeng), Lee Tsiantis, Universal, Vanguard Cinema, Visionary Cinema (Scott Essman), Warner Home Video (Karen Penhale), Wellspring Video (Jill Goldstein PR). No more room!

PHOTO SOURCES:

Anchor Bay Entertainment (52, 54), Blue Underground (58, 62, 63), Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment (26-36, 55, 60), Criterion (66), Dan Gale Collection (79), Glittering Images (7), Image Entertainment (40, 65), Donna Lucas (back), Manga Video (10-12), McFarland and Company (72, 74), Michael Wiese Productions (49), Paramount Home Entertainment (41, 57), Replay Home Entertainment (19), Retromedia Entertainment (38), Salvation Films (67), Something Weird Video (14), Synapse Films (50), Tai Seng Entertainment (15), Universal (22, 23), Vanguard Cinema (51), Visionary Cinema (4, 5), Warner Bros. (inside), Warner Home Video (42-47), Wellspring Video (17), Samuel Z. Archive (20, 70). **ARTWORK:** Charlie Largent (front), Pete Fitzgerald (20). **LOGO & COVER FORMAT:** Radomir Perica (International Design Studio, Bethesda MD).

Dedicated to Conrad Hall, Kenneth Tobey, Joe Strummer, Kinji Fukasaku, Micky Finn and Billy Van.

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VISIT THE VIDEO WATCHDOG WEBSITE: <http://www.videowatchdog.com>

THE WATCHDOG BARKS



With my main VHS player starting to misbehave, I have gone shopping to see what's out there, and I'm shocked by what is being presented to consumers. Store chains like Best Buy and Circuit City promote themselves as key sources for home electronics, but you can't find a VCR being sold in either place that costs (or is worth) much more than \$120; regardless of the manufacturer, all new VCRs look cheap and, indeed, are so cheap that they are truly disposable—these are machines to be replaced rather than repaired. In order to find a quality VCR, you need to go online, where if you look long and hard enough, you can find industrial VCRs priced at the sum that used to pay for an average consumer deck. One thing disturbs me, as a prospective buyer, is that the current generation of VCR has greatly reduced the number of AV inputs and outputs on the back. My home entertainment system contains a multi-standard VHS player, a Super Beta deck, a laserdisc player and, of course, a DVD player, and I'm accustomed to running them all through my main VHS player, in case I need to copy something; my dying VHS player, which is maybe 15 years old, can support these, but it appears that whatever I finally get to replace it, however high-end it may be, will not.

The industry is not-so-gently nudging us toward the inevitable end of DVD-R recording. I'm sure we're all interested in making this evolutionary jump, but most of us aren't financially there yet, and some of us feel that the technology isn't quite there yet—in terms of cost, and also in terms of what DVD-R recording can presently deliver. Some decks record a maximum of two hours per disc, others can record at different speeds that deliver roughly as much as a two-hour tape when recorded at LP and EP/SLP. I'm told that the slowest-speed DVD-R recording delivers a picture equal to SP VHS, which is a terrific recommendation... but the problem about DVD-R recording is the higher cost of DVD-RW discs. To record directly onto DVD-R from a cable broadcast is a financial

risk. For the VHS home taper, the kind of random cable outage that regularly occurs (or one of those damned weekly system maintenance tests that are prone to interrupt late show movie dialogue like "... and the killer is...") wastes nothing more than one's time; if you're recording the same telecast onto a DVD-R blank, you're automatically out at least five dollars. So do you go with the more expensive DVD-RW (rewritable) blank as the basis of all your recording, and then copy a successful result to DVD-R? That's going to necessitate a second DVD recorder, and involve more of your time—you may spend so much time perfecting your recording that you won't want to look at it again anytime soon. It's a shaky set-up, of better cosmetic quality than VHS, but not nearly as efficient—yet this is what the video industry is forcing us toward. I say: Standardize DVD-RW and price it like a DVD-R; then it might *begin* to replace VHS.

VW contributor Stephen R. Bissette, who works as a co-manager of First Run Video in Marlboro, Vermont (the most recent winner of the VSDA's Independent Retailer of the Year Award), tells me that he is seeing increasing evidence of VHS being deliberately shut out by the video industry itself. New VHS releases are being given such a narrow window of availability that some titles, released as recently as last August or September, may already be out of print. And when Steve places a single order with Baker & Taylor on behalf of a customer, their reps recently added a new standard question to the process: "We have [fill in number] copies of that title in our warehouse; would you be interested in ordering more?" Implicit in that question, of course, is "When they're gone, they're gone."

Our "Video Tapevine" section will probably continue for another few issues at least, but don't be surprised if it morphs into something else before we reach our 100th issue later this year. We haven't decided yet whether we're going to devote that vacated space to reviews of DVD-Rs (which looks to be a VHS alternative for outlets like Sinister Cinema and Something Weird Video), expanded Import DVD coverage (my own inclination), capsule reviews, or an occasional return of "Tapes from the Attic." As we await the inevitable, we would certainly be interested in hearing your preferences.

Tim Lucas

Honoring Jack Pierce



On June 17, 2000, in Pasadena, California, writer/director/producer Scott Essman brought the curtain up on **JACK PIERCE—THE MAN BEHIND THE MONSTERS**, a dramatic tribute to the ingenious makeup artist (1889–1968) responsible for designing the classic iconography of Universal's greatest monsters. The one-time performance, which took place before an audience of 500, was recorded by three video-cameras and has now been released as an extras-laden DVD by Essman's company Visionary Cinema (\$25.00 ppd., 72m).

The play, starring Perry Shields as Pierce (in makeup by Rob Burman), is essentially a one-man show, with B&W side-bars recreating scenes from **FRANKENSTEIN**, **THE MUMMY**, **THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN**, **SON OF FRANKENSTEIN** and **THE WOLF MAN** onstage. With the exception of a short scene imagining a makeup session between Pierce and Conrad Veidt for **THE MAN WHO LAUGHS** (which finds the makeup man telling the accomplished actor how to play Gwynplaine), Shields is mostly obliged to read his

immense volume of dialogue from a script none-too-well disguised as a career scrapbook; it's not very dramatic, and frankly, Pierce—especially as portrayed here—simply isn't a warm enough, or familiar enough, character to carry a one-man show. The script also makes

The Bride (Sheila Marie Shostac) recoils from the affections of her groom (Matt Thompson) in a staged recreation of THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN from JACK PIERCE: THE MAN BEHIND THE MONSTERS.

some odd assertions, with "Pierce" claiming that "Papa" Karl Freund "took control" of Tod Browning's **DRACULA**, that Karloff stood 7½ feet tall in his Frankenstein's Monster makeup (an actual photo of Karloff and Pierce together shows him reaching the actor's shoulder with no trouble), and that he "wanted Boris" to play "both" mummies in **THE MUMMY**. The title of the film for which Pierce created his first creature makeup, for an ape man, is not even given (it was 1929's **THE MONKEY TALKS**), and when the play ends with Pierce climbing into a coffin for his own poorly attended funeral, one feels uncomfortable and embarrassed rather than sympathetic or affectionate. The program gets a much-needed shot in the arm with the movie recreations, which show a real love for the material; particularly good are Sheila Marie Shostac as the Bride of Frankenstein and Denise Moses as Una O'Connor. Also in the cast is Daniel Roebuck (who played Jay Leno in the HBO movie **THE LATE SHOW**) as Bela Lugosi's Ygor. Some sound bytes from the original Universal films are used, as well.

While the play could be recommended only to the curious, the DVD contains some extras that make it more tempting to acquire. The supplementary section includes an excerpt from **THIS IS YOUR LIFE** (2m 6s) reuniting Pierce and Boris Karloff, and an audio-only interview with Pierce (10m 31s) conducted following a September 17, 1963 broadcast of (apparently) **IT! THE TERROR FROM BEYOND SPACE** on KHJ-TV's **MILLION DOLLAR MOVIE**—fortuitously recorded by Bob Burns. Also included is an historical timeline of Pierce's life and career, a shot of his star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame (no clue as to where to find it,

though), a 5m 30s "Making Of" short that focuses on the actors being made-up and outfitted for their roles (we see Bob Burns wowing Matt Thompson's Frankenstein Monster, that resembles that of Glenn Strange), and a 3m 11s trailer that ends with comments from Burns, Pierce assistant Abe Haberman, and makeup artists Harry Thomas and Dick Smith.

The NTSC disc, which carries no region code information, is priced at \$25.00 postpaid and is available for online purchase from www.jackpierce.com (where you can also read a full account of the production). VISA and MasterCard are accepted. Payments by either card, or by personal check or money order, may also be addressed to Visionary Cinema at PO Box 1722, Glendora CA 91740. —Tim Lucas

The Name is Batman... James Batman

The popularity of the **BATMAN** TV show in the 1960s, as well as the Warner Bros. franchise that began with Tim Burton's **BATMAN** (1989), has inspired a number of unauthorized cinematic adaptations and parodies around the world. Very few of them are known to fans in the US, though some have begun to surface on gray market video labels, mastered from various foreign language VHS tapes that began turning up in Spanish and Asian video-stores in the late '80s and early '90s.

Sadly, the most intriguing Batman films may be lost to the ravages of time. **Fantoma İstanbul'da Bulusalım** ("Fantomas, Let's Meet In Istanbul," 1967), a Turkish production that pits Batman against the French

master criminal Fantomas, has yet to surface despite a mention in Pete Tombs' seminal book **MONDO MACABRO**. Similarly, the Filipino production **BATMAN FIGHTS DRACULA** (1967) has also proven maddeningly elusive. Currently, the only unauthorized Batman films to make an appearance on video anywhere in the world, have been the goofy Filipino musical **Alyas Batman y Robin** (1993), the oafish and depressing Mexican "comedy" **La Verdadera Historia De Barman y Droguin** (c. 1986), the Korean children's film **Superbatman Vs. Mazinga V** and the admittedly sexy, campy *lucha-libre* film **La Mujer Murcielago** ("Batwoman," 1967), also from Mexico.

Recently, the Manila-based Kabayan Central Networks Inc. has recently issued a number of old, rare, B&W Tagalog language films on VHS. Included in their catalogue is **JAMES BATMAN**, a jaw-dropping, low-budget, Filipino gem that combines Batman, Robin, James Bond, and a number of over-the-top spy movie clichés into a violent, erotic mix that film fans aren't used to seeing outside the work of Jess Franco and Yilmaz Atadeniz.

Obviously filmed on a minuscule budget, **JAMES BATMAN** stars popular comedian Dolphy (an institution in the Phillipines, who still acts in movies today) as both Batman and James Bond. When a Fu Manchu look-alike threatens the Phillipines with nuclear destruction (by showing historical atomic bomb test footage), the military calls in—who else?—Batman and James Bond to straighten out the mess. The two rivals investigate on their own, with each of them encountering various henchmen, hit-women and assassins before Bond and Batman's girlfriend are

captured by the Penguin and a mysterious supervillain with a metal skullcap and a giant, claw shaped death-ray.

The movie was obviously a vehicle for Dolphy, whose humor is of the “Oh no, I’ve lost my pants!” variety, yet somehow never becomes as overbearing as similar schtick in **Alyas Batman y Robin**. This is due largely to the direction of Artemio Marquez. Despite the kiddie subject matter, **JAMES BATMAN** contains a disarming undercurrent of sleaze and chaos. Barely five minutes can go by without a lengthy, and realistic looking, fistfight. One moment in particular, in which Bond wrestles with a bikini-clad assassin, looks like something from a Doris Wishman roughie. Another scene depicts Batman’s girlfriend—scantly clad and tied with her hands behind her back—arching her back painfully so the camera can film her from an alluring angle. As the film progresses, the comedic moments seem to fade away, as violent eroticism and provocative imagery take centerstage. The final 30m are deliriously fetishistic as black-hooded hench-women—barefoot, with plunging necklines, and packing machine-guns—take on our heroes in a riotous mêlée of bullets and fisticuffs.

JAMES BATMAN was released in 1966, the same year that Leslie Martinson directed the “official” version with Adam West and Burt Ward for 20th Century Fox. While Martinson’s film premiered in July of that year, it’s possible that **JAMES BATMAN** (which is clearly inspired by the BATMAN TV show, even to the extent of cribbing the show’s popular theme song) may have been released prior to the American film.

So, who is Artemio Marquez, the director of this pop culture oddity? Based on his work in

JAMES BATMAN, he is one of a handful of filmmakers that understand the unconscious eroticism that can be found when low-budget cinema meets the pop aesthetics of the comic strip. A brief websearch turned up a handful of interesting titles like **THE MAGNIFICENT ZORRO** (1966), **MEN OF ACTION MEET THE WOMEN OF DRACULA** (1971), and a 1974 film entitled **LOLLIPOPS AND ROSES**, starring Don Johnson and Davy Jones (!). To the best of our knowledge, none of these films are available on video, and given the sorry state of film preservation in the Philippines, it’s possible that very few, if any, of Marquez’s films still exist.

Thankfully, Kabayan Central has made **JAMES BATMAN** available for reassessment on NTSC VHS. The source print is a mess, with severe damage in places and numerous audio dropouts. The contrasts are sharp, however, and the tape looks very close to the source material with little, or no, generational lost. It can be ordered for \$24.95, plus shipping and handling from Kabayan Central Net Works Inc. (www.kabayancentral.com), PO Box 2055 Manila-CPO, 1060 Philippines; US Fax: 413-228-1094, Manilla Ph/Fax: 011-632-637-3859. —David White

Lugosi's Devil Worshipping Days

One of the most obscure titles in Bela Lugosi’s little-known European career is a lost 1920 German production entitled **Die Teufelsenbeter** (“The Devil Worshippers”). It has come to our notice that the posthumously published memoirs of Turkish director Muhsin Ertugrul, who was involved with the said production, offers an

interesting account of how Lugosi was cast in this picture, including information about his salary. The book was published in a strictly limited edition, already out-of-print and available only in Turkish libraries, so it is very little-known even amongst Turkish film fans.

Ertugrul, who would later become a major director in Turkey, was one of the co-founders of Ustad Film, a Berlin production company set up to adapt German pulp fiction author Karl May’s works, most of which are set in Turkey, to cinema. Ertugrul recounts the casting of Lugosi in these words:

“My assistant Reimann said that he had taken someone who wanted to see me to the director’s room. When I went inside, I saw a tall, pale-faced man in worn-out clothes waiting. I let him sit down. He said, ‘My name is Bela Lugosi. I am coming from Budapest. I am not going to hide from you that I was involved with the Bela Kuhn revolution [the short-lived and suppressed Hungarian Communist revolution of 1919]. I could not stay in Hungary. Now, I am looking for employment here.’ I did not want to make him go on. I told him, ‘I am beginning a new movie and there you will have a role large enough to satisfy you.’ I wrote a note to Ustad Film director Knefels to engage Bela Lugosi with a salary of ten thousand marks per month during the course of the shooting.”

For the record, it should be noted that **Die Teufelsenbeter** should not be considered a horror movie despite what its title might suggest. Based on the plot of its literary source (a novel with the same title), it can be surmised that it was an adventure film chronicling the endeavors of a German hero protecting a

devil-worshipping religious minority from the tyranny of an Ottoman governor. Lugosi appeared in another Ustad Film production that same year, **Die Todeskarawane** ("Death Caravan").

The true directorial credit for these Ustad movies is unclear. Most sources co-credit Marie Luise Droop with "Ertugrul Musshin [sic] Bey," whereas Ertugrul's memoirs seem to state that it was he himself who sat at the helm, while screenwriter Droop supervised their post-production. —Kaya Özkaracalar

New From Glittering Images

Glittering Images, those Italian-based publishers of beautiful film books, have issued the fourth hardcover installment of their popular BIZARRE SINEMA! series. Entitled CULTISH SHOCKING HORRORS: (SUR)REALISM, SADISM AND EROTICISM, 1950s-1960s, the 176-page volume is a select but lavish tour of the memorable horror films of the period that introduced an experimental blend of sex and horror.

Authors Carlos Aguilar (who wrote the series' earlier Jess Franco volume), Christophe Bier, Jean-Pierre Bouyxou (the French critic who played the blind Dr. Orloff in Franco's **FEMALE VAMPIRE**), Antonio Bruschini, Pierre Charles and Gérard Mangin pay tribute to the Mexican **El Monstru Resucitado** (1953) and **El Mundo de los Vampiros** [US: WORLD OF THE VAMPIRES, 1960], the German **Ein Toten Hing im Netz** [US: HORRORS OF SPIDER ISLAND aka IT'S HOT IN PARADISE, 1959], the British **BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRE** (1958), **CIRCUS OF HORRORS** and **PEEPING TOM** (both 1960), the Italian **Il**

mulino del donna di pietra [US: **MILL OF THE STONE WOMEN**, 1960], and the Spanish/French co-production **Gritos en la Noche** [US: **THE AWFUL DR. ORLOF**, 1962]. The chapters devoted to these respective films are by no means limited to them; the **BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRE** chapter, for example, also explores the "continental versions" of other Robert Baker & Monty Berman productions, including **THE HELLFIRE CLUB** and **THE FLESH AND THE FIENDS**, complete with rare photographic documentation of their nude scenes (in some cases, copied from the rare "Erotisme et Epouvante" issue

of MIDI-MINUIT FANTASTIQUE). As usual with this series, the text of each chapter is presented in Italian, English and French, and the book is lavishly illustrated with rare European poster art, stills and other artifacts in full color.

While the text and images are a glutton's feast, the book may show some traces of redundancy to collectors of Glittering Cinema's publications. Several of the chosen titles have been covered (and similarly illustrated) in earlier GI books, and two of the erotic comic strip tributes (Giorgio Donati's **PEEPING TOM** and Leone Frollo's **HORRORS OF SPIDER ISLAND**) are reprinted

Bizarre Cinema!
WILDEST SEXIEST WEIRDEST SLEAZIEST FILMS

Cultish Shocking Horrors
(Sur)realism, Sadism and Eroticism, 1950s-1960s

from the indispensable 1989 book DIVA CINEMA, 1951-1965. There is no denying, though, that all of the films are given their fullest coverage in the present work, which also includes some intriguing excerpts from various Italian *fumetti* (photo-comics) adaptations. The full color reproduction of the Belgian poster for **HORRORS OF THE BLACK MUSEUM** (the best art we've seen on this title) and a semi-nude portrait of **CIRCUS OF HORRORS'** Yvonne Romain alone reward the price of admission—which happens to be 47 Euros. Edited by Stefano Piselli and Riccardo Morrocchi, CULTISH SHOCKING HORRORS can be ordered directly from the GI website (www.glitteringimages.com) by International Money Order, bank check or money transfer. It is also available domestically for \$49.95 from Luminous Film and Video Wurks (see Sources). —Tim Lucas

VW Wins Coveted Rondo Award

VIDEO WATCHDOG was voted "Best Magazine" by pollsters participating in the First Annual Rondo Hatton Awards, hosted by AOL's Classic Horror Film Board (CHFB) last January. Initiated by CHFB founder David Colton, who by day serves as front page editor of USA TODAY, the award—affectionately dubbed "the Rondo"—was conceived to accentuate the positive in horror fandom by recognizing works of quality in all areas of genre film-related entertainment.

Colton initially expected the Rondos to remain a CHFB exclusive, but when outside votes began filtering in, he arranged for the ballot to also be posted on the Mobius Home Video Forum,

the alt.movies.silents newsgroup, and other participating sites. The nominees were decided by Colton, with the help of a dozen friends and correspondents, and votes were required to be sent directly to his own e-mail address, accompanied by the voter's real name to prevent pseudonymous ballot stuffing. In the end, the whim that was the Rondo Awards caught fire, attracting the participation of nearly 200 voters.

"This is not a scientific poll," Colton allowed. "It is merely 196 people who decided to vote. But, as someone who has dealt with polls, I do know that entire elections are called on the basis of 600 people or less, and I'm really satisfied that this has captured most of the 'classic horror electorate.' I don't think it would be fair to list everyone who voted, but it truly was fandom—not AOL fandom, not niche fandom, but *fandom*."

VIDEO WATCHDOG won its category with an impressive 40% of the popular vote, and the award for Best Article of the Year went to Tom Weaver's "Kay Linaker: At War with Tod Browning and James Whale," featured in VW #90. VW also had by far the greatest number of nominees in this category, including Bill Cooke's "Boxed Turtle: The Classic Gamera on Import DVD, Pt. 1" (VW #86, the first runner-up), Sean Murphy's "**BUCKAROO BANZAI**: The Full Story Declassified At Last!" (VW #82), Paul Talbot's "Reflections in a Haunted Eye: The Making of **THE WATCHER IN THE WOODS**" (VW #88) and David J. Schow's "We Are Controlling Transmission: **THE OUTER LIMITS** Comes to DVD" (VW #89). Tom Weaver was also voted Best Writer of the Year, with VW's Tim Lucas following in second place.

Other winners:

Best Genre Film:
**LORD OF THE RINGS:
THE TWO TOWERS**

Best TV Presentation:
BUFFY, THE VAMPIRE SLAYER

Best DVD:
**CURSE OF THE DEMON/
NIGHT OF THE DEMON**

Best Restoration:
a tie between TCM's
LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT
and **METROPOLIS**

Best Book:
HEAVEN AND HELL TO PLAY
WITH: THE FILMING OF
"THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER"
by Preston Neal Jones

Best Convention:
Monster Bash

Best Other Horror
Board: Kerry Gammill's
MONSTER KID
ONLINE MAGAZINE
(<http://gammillustrations.bizland.com>)

Best Fan Event:
Bob Burns' Halloween
recreation of **THE THING**

Best Controversy:
"Ferry vs. Ferry"

Best Comeback:
Forrest J Ackerman

Classic Most in Need of
DVD Release:
KING KONG (1933)

Gratified by the enthusiastic response to his idea, Colton is promising a more organized Rondo Awards for next year, and is actively soliciting nominations for the 2003 presentations at Taraco@aol.com.



VIDEO TAPEVINE

Between Astro Boy, Maria Braun and a Winchester

A NOTE ON TIMINGS

The timings listed for the following tapes reflect only the length of the film itself, and do not include such ephemera as video company logos, FBI warnings, supplementary trailers, or MPAA ratings certificates. The only exceptions to this rule are those films in which the soundtrack is first heard while the distributor's logo is still onscreen.

ASTRO BOY VOLUME 4

1982, Manga Video, HF/S/+, \$19.95, 145m 20s, VHS

ASTRO BOY VOLUME 5

1982, Manga Video, HF/S/+, \$19.95, 145m 6s, VHS

ASTRO BOY VOLUME 6

1982, Manga Video, HF/S/+, \$19.95, 145m 20s, VHS

The updated, full-color adventures of Osamu Tezuka's boy robot continue their long-delayed American debut in this, the middle third of a projected nine-volume VHS release from Manga Video. Volumes 1-3 [reviewed VW 89:11] contained five episodes apiece—the subsequent tapes each include six. Though a sense of repetition and exhaustion was in evidence by the end of **VOLUME 3**, further exploration reveals that the show (a revision of Tezuka's B&W original from the 1960s) still had a number of surprising cards to play. All episodes were directed by Noboru Ishiguro and produced by Hidehiko Takei and Satoshi Yamamoto.

By the time the new ASTRO BOY reached its fifteenth episode, we had already seen more than one "runaway vehicle" adventure, as well as several encounters

between the eponymous AI-hero and his nemesis Atlas (a renegade robot originally created by Skunk, one of Astro's organic enemies). So when **VOLUME 4** begins with an Atlas story called "The Runaway Subway Train," one's hopes aren't exactly raised. Atlas, with his Crystal Castle and reluctant sister Livian in tow, challenges Astro to a duel. When Astro refuses the challenge, Atlas retaliates by once again endangering the lives of his classmates, who are enjoying a ride on a brand new, automated subway system. There's no new

KEY

+	Supplements
16:9	WS TV Adaptable
CC	Closed Captioned
D	Digital
DD	Dolby Digital
DTS	Digital Theater Systems (Audio)
DVD-0	No Region Code
DVD-1	USA, Canada
DVD-2	Europe, Japan
HF	Hi-Fi
LB	Letterboxed
MA	Multiple Audio
NSR	No Suggested Retail
OOP	Out of Print
P&S	Pan&Scan
S	Stereo
SS	Surround Sound
ST	Subtitles

ground broken here, though it's amusing when "Mr. Daddy Walrus" (Astro's teacher) tries to ward Atlas off with a tennis ball machine.

"The Monster of Clarken" introduces Astro to an underwater robot known as Peppy the Merboy, who requests Astro's help in defending the local sea life (including a talking dolphin) from a "monster" that most suspect is nothing more than a violent current. But there's more than one palpable threat here—evil carnival magician Mandrake the Fourth smells gold, there's a volcano ready to blow beneath the surface—and, yes, the "monster"

is real, too. Astro displays some distressing values here; his defense of living things seems to apply only to the cute varieties of life. Balance of nature be damned, when a school of sharks moves in on the "nice" animals, Astro is happy to kill them all by dragging them out of the ocean and dropping them on a fishing boat (and on top of the robots who man it)!

An ancient fairy tale prepares Astro for his encounter with Galon, "The Genie From Outer Space." This lethal visitor, whom a certain Professor Adams is deluded enough to believe he can control, vows to destroy the world

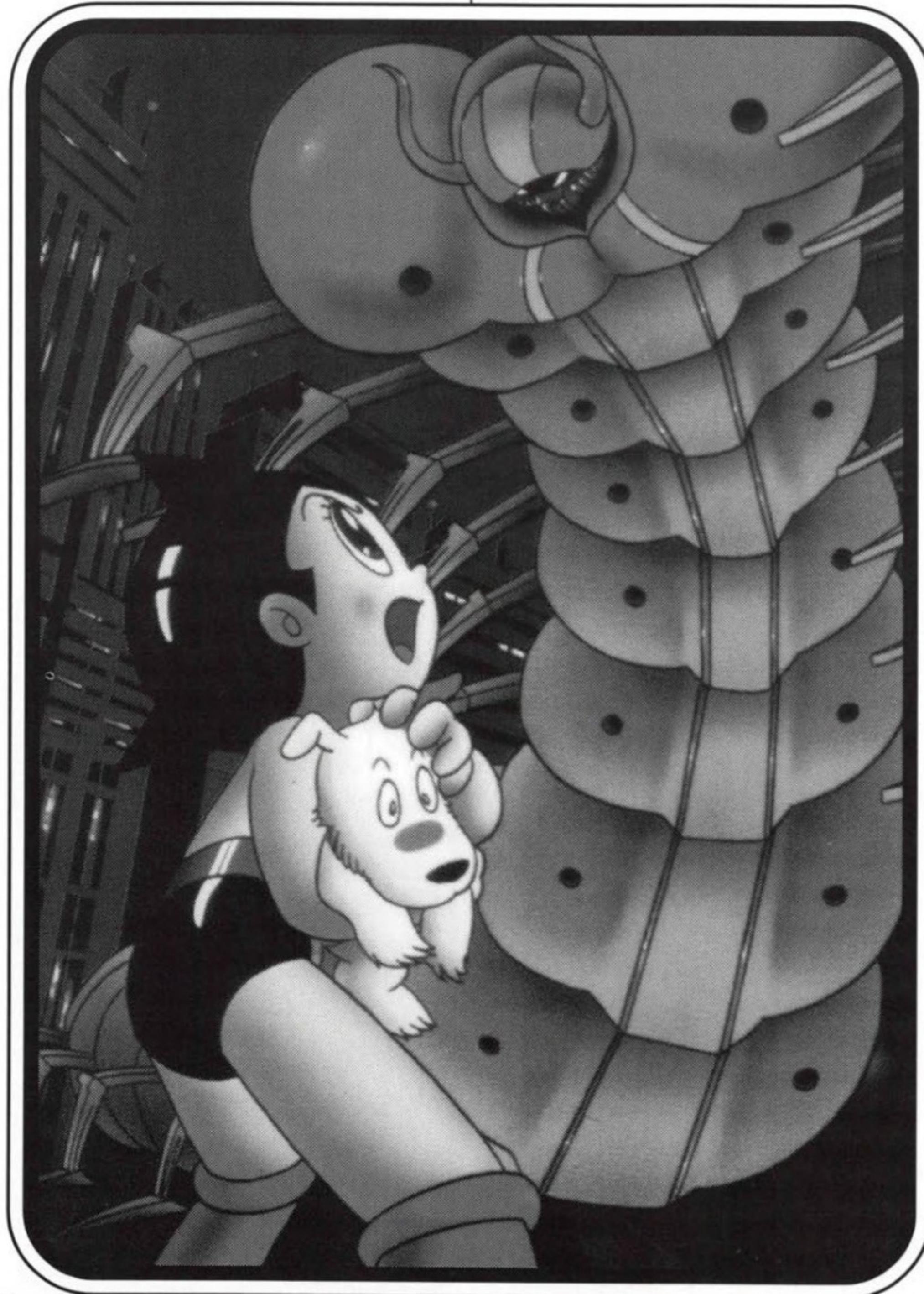
with lethal gas (human fatalities consisting of black native islanders are on display at one point), forcing Astro to outsmart him.

Next up is "The Robots Nobody Wanted." The robots in question are a nurse, a welder and a fireman—disposed of by their human charges for failing in their duties. Astro attempts to find them gainful employment elsewhere—a visit to a South Seas island (where we find rather embarrassing native caricatures on display) doesn't quite work, but an unexpected disaster just might do the trick.

"The Girl From Alsoar" is Violet, one of the last survivors of a distant world, who finds herself threatened while Astro and his robotic family are enjoying a ski trip. This episode is successful in building up to a bittersweet ending; it's only regrettable insofar as it includes a sequence in which Astro sends a pack of dogs over the edge of a snowy cliff, rolling and tumbling into snowballs.

Wrapping up **VOLUME 4** is the daring "Robot Land." Astro and his family attempt to protect Odett, a robot who appears to them in the guise of a wounded swan, from a spectacular villain known as Devil King. It is not the story that makes this entry such a stand-out; it's Robot Land itself, a setting apparently designed to tweak as many Disney copyrights as Tezuka could get away with ("Peter Pan" and a certain "magic mirror" are only part of the picture)! We also get a dragon that roars with the unmistakable voice of *kaiju* favorite Gamera, and cues from the classical music standbys "Swan Lake" and "Night on Bald Mountain" (the use of the latter was inspired by **FANTASIA**, no doubt).

The strains of Edvard Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King" highlight "The Robot Vikings,"



Volume 5's opening episode. The Vikings themselves are a squadron of robot marauders who, in both appearance and in the way they skate in unison, resemble one of the teams from Norman Jewison's **ROLLERBALL**, albeit on a larger scale. (They bandy a huge silver ball about at one point, lest there be any doubt.) A seeming attempt to resolve Astro's apparent animal-rights issues is at the heart of this episode: we're abruptly reintroduced to Jump, formerly the dog of Toby, Astro's deceased human model. Jump now lives with Astro's family, but Astro's sister Uran (pronounced "you-rain") has no patience with his organic limitations and professes not to care when Jump is severely injured at the hands of the Vikings; she much prefers his robotic replacement, but this "extra-special" watchdog fares no better. Astro even dresses up as a dog himself at one point! But just when you thought it was safe, the surprise appearance of Livian reveals who was behind the creation of the Vikings in the first place...

Atlas is back again in "The Great Meltdown." Here, Livian escapes the Crystal Castle in an attempt to reach Astro, so that the boy robot can stop Atlas from flooding the world by melting the icecap at the North Pole. Thankfully, the colorful but overused challenger takes a good, long vacation after this episode.

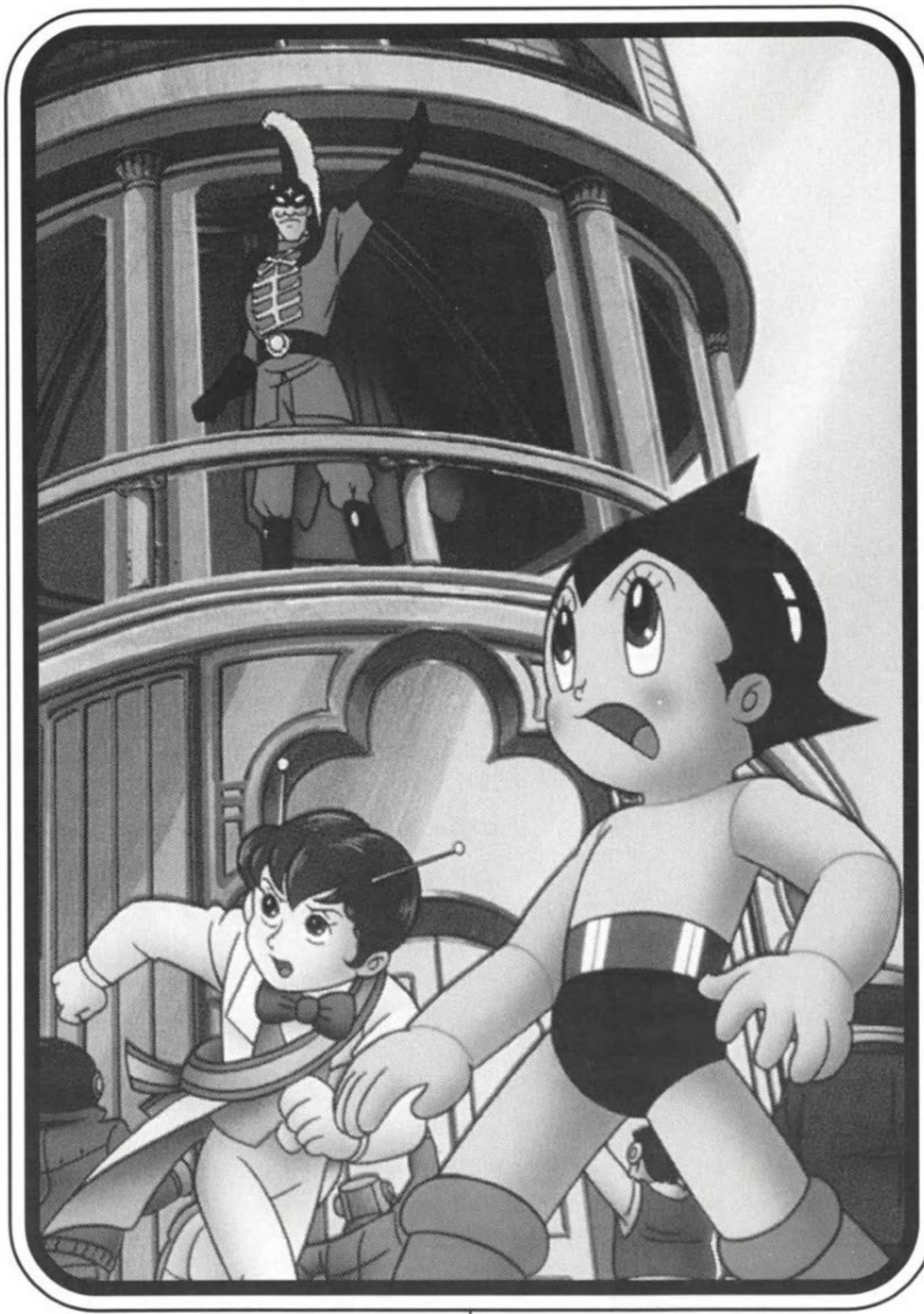
A particularly strange entry is "Lilly on Peligro Island." After finding no less than 43 message-filled bottles, Astro sets off on a rescue mission that's anything but simple. Peligro Island, named in the messages, appears on no map, and Astro risks execution (!) for travelling outside the country in open defiance of "Robot Law." Astro's quest to rescue the elusive Lilly also involves battling



(what only appears to be) a sea monster, and infiltrating a hospital unit in nurse drag!

In "The Snow Leopard," an artificial snowfall delights the local citizenry until it is discovered that the snow contains a chemical agent that causes breakdowns in any robot it touches. It's the work of the diabolical Professor Feeney—and Astro learns, to his regret, that Feeney's monster leopard is composed of the same material as the "snow." This episode features the voice of Gamera's enemy Gaos; Tezuka explored live-action *kaiju* territory himself in his series THE SPACE GIANTS.

Legend has it that when "The Human-Faced Rock" shifts its ancient position in order to "look" in another direction, then disaster will befall the village it overlooks. And it looks like it's going to happen during a visit by Astro, Uran and Daddy Walrus. Might the obsessed archaeologist Professor Lewis have something to do with it? Or might it be his own robotic companion, Fireball? A "robot rights" theme runs throughout the series, and Fireball brings it vividly into focus; his treatment at the hands of Lewis inspires him to become a bully to Uran and a thorn in the side of Astro, and it culminates in his delight



at the prospect of leaving his owner to a slow death by drowning!

At the end of **VOLUME 5** is "Uran's Twin." When Astro's sister is ordered to attend piano class—as opposed to enjoying the action at the Robot Wrestling arena—she wishes she could be in two places at once. And wouldn't you know it? The latest in the series' endless supply of crackpot inventors knows how to make her wish come true, and he's only too happy to do so when he sees what Uran is capable of in the ring. But this is no ordinary "duplicate" adventure: Uran finds herself able to

split her body in half with sheer willpower, with her respective "missing" halves growing back artificially in an imaginative (if somewhat creepy) touch.

VOLUME 6 contains the most interesting sampling of episodes yet, starting with "Outer Spaceport R45." This refueling station/hotel is being menaced by space pirates: the elderly manager is being pressured to retire for his failure to stop the attacks, but his son (a heroic commander) promises to save the day. While Astro is involved in the action of the episode, the emphasis remains on the father and son: the latter is disturbed to discover the

former apparently disposing of a dead body, but an even more disturbing (if somewhat implausible) revelation is in store...

"The Red Cat" starts off as a haunted house story set at "13 13th Street," but Chili (or is that Chilly?), the mysterious cat of the title, leads Astro and friends to a massive (if misguided) animal conservation effort led by the frail (and feline-in-appearance) Professor Leopold. This being ASTRO BOY, it's not surprising that at least one animal bites the dust—but the episode is sincere in its message that animals should be protected.

In an echo of a Hollywood disaster film, Astro finds himself on "The Wreck of the Titan" with an assorted bunch of characters when a meteor storm damages a luxury spaceliner on its maiden voyage. The escape pod inhabited by Astro and company becomes stranded on the moon, and the increasingly desperate human characters must determine how to survive—and for how long. The wreckage of a Russian spacecraft (from the then-future year of 1990), and the secrets it contains, may be the answer to their prayers. Amusingly, the most belligerent of the strandees resembles Ernest Borgnine in **THE POSEIDON ADVENTURE**, but his character arc diverges significantly; he's involved in one of the most unsettling, downbeat endings ever seen in the annals of children's programming.

Special governmental permission allows Astro to travel abroad with mentor Professor Elefen to the country of Garavia, where an artificial boy named Richie is about to become "A Robot President." Though the general populace has no problem with the idea, there is a political faction (the Dead Cross Party) that wants no part of it and will stoop to anything—including

assassination—to stop the ceremony from taking place. The sinister faction's name is taken to literal extremes: in a sequence unthinkable for American children's television (remember, this series was never televised State-side), Astro must rescue a character who has literally been crucified (not with nails, thankfully); he then uses the cross itself to ward off his attackers, much as Dustin Hoffman did in the climax of **THE GRADUATE!**

Those familiar with such previous Tezuka series as KIMBA THE WHITE LION and THE SPACE GIANTS can easily point out the strong religious overtones found therein—but they are particularly surprising when they arise in ASTRO BOY, whose world would seem to leave little room for such themes. Revolutionizing this idea is the next episode, "Uran's Quest." Uran's friendship with a human child—and the misadventures and misunderstandings that result—cause her to wonder if she, too, has a God. Dutiful library study of Christianity, Buddhism and Islam do nothing for her, so she visits Children's Land, an amusement park hosting the supposedly all-knowing computer attraction "Dr. Zarr," in order to ask him about "the robot God." At this point, anyone who's seen **A.I.: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE** will immediately flash to "Dr. Know," an extremely similar attraction voiced in Steven Spielberg's film by Robin Williams. The coincidence is profound, indeed... but Dr. Know didn't abruptly decide that he was God! It's a safe bet that this fascinating, deliberately provocative episode ("You can't escape from God! Believe in me or die!") was a huge part of the reason that the new ASTRO BOY series failed to achieve US syndication.

A god of a different stripe is invoked in "The World of Odin,"

which concludes **VOLUME 6**. Finding himself on a quest to locate the legendary gold treasure of King Erik on a Nordic expedition, Astro finds it difficult to comprehend the violent code of honor shared by his fellow travellers, which includes ritual combat to the death. The Norsemen, in turn, find the nature of the "god" awaiting them at the end of their trek equally baffling. This is another mature, intelligent take on an unusual and ambitious theme.

Whereas **ASTRO BOY VOLUME 3** left us wanting a bit less, **VOLUME 6** has just the opposite effect, and it would be a shame for anyone who embarks on this series to drop out before reaching it. As with the previous tapes, previews for the next volume's episodes are found at the end of each collection. Next up is a more down-to-earth adventure, set in the world of entertainment, entitled "The Robot Stuntman"—and there's still no sign of Atlas, though a genuinely climactic confrontation would be welcome—and is expected—by the end of the series. The video quality and the simple stereo mix are consistently acceptable on each tape. The next three tapes, **VOLUMES 7 through 9**, will complete the full run of the 51-episode saga. —Shane M. Dallmann

BETWEEN GOD, THE DEVIL AND A WINCHESTER

*Anche nel west c'era una volta Dio
"God Was in the West, Too,
at One Time"
1968, Something Weird Video,
HF/LB, \$20.00 ppd, 94m 34s, VHS*

Pursued by a band of killers, ex-Confederate colonel-turned-bandit Bob Ford (**LIGHTNING BOLT**'s Folco Lulli) offers wagon-master Juan Chasquido (Gilbert Roland) \$5,000 to take him to

the dangerous region of Sierra Blanco—no questions asked. Ford perishes shortly thereafter when the inn where he is staying is invaded by a gang of Mexican bandits, led by Pedro Butch (**GET MEAN**'s Raf Baldassare). When Pat Jordan (Richard Harrison) arrives at the place, he offers Chasquido (who wears a steel gauntlet over his useless left hand) the same deal that Ford proposed. A young boy named Tommy saw where the colonel hid a treasure map and passed it along to Jordan, who now seeks the fortune in loot that Ford has stashed away. Chasquido secretly cuts a deal with Butch to split the haul once Jordan and his party have found it; however, he then proceeds to make the same offer to the other men (led by Ennio Girolami) on the Jordan expedition. Tommy overhears this bit of skullduggery and informs Jordan, but Chasquido has more surprises in store.

A Spaghetti Western version of **TREASURE ISLAND**, this minor effort benefits from the magnetism that veteran actor Gilbert Roland brings to the proceedings. Fairly spry and still somewhat youthful-looking at 62, Roland stands out in a cast that otherwise adds little to their weakly-written roles. Richard Harrison's performance is appropriately reserved, given Jordan's true identity as a priest out to recover his parish's golden artifacts. However, the rest of the actors are broad and graceless, the worst offender being Roberto Camardiel (**UP THE MACGREGORS**), who provides tired comic relief as "Uncle Pink," a seemingly brain-damaged inn owner/bad cook. The gunplay and intrigue are routine as these films go, but Carlo Savina's score provides some panache and the climax (which takes place in picturesque caves) is satisfactorily staged. Director



Gilbert Roland (left) engages in the old Spaghetti Western triple cross in *BETWEEN GOD, THE DEVIL AND A WINCHESTER*.

Marino Girolami (credited here as "Dario Silvestri") is the father of Ennio Girolami; the latter's younger brother, director Enzo G. Castellari, also reportedly has a small role here, but we missed him.

A cropped version of **BETWEEN GOD, THE DEVIL AND A WINCHESTER** was previously released by Unicorn Video. Something Weird's transfer is letterboxed but suffers from major problems that largely negate its utility. The source material is plagued by numerous disruptive splices during the opening reel (in the prologue, a supporting actor is talking to another and then—SPLICE—is lying dead on the ground with a bullet hole in his chest) and so much dialogue is ellipsed that several conversations in the opening minutes are rendered incoherent. The breaks are far less frequent after that, but stains and arc burn are constantly in evidence. Blacks are light, whites bloom, and the Eastmancolor hues often look bleached out; the sound is hissy but passable. Although the Techniscope frame measures 2.30:1, the image is noticeably squeezed, the credits

do not fit comfortably onscreen, and the vertical framing is extremely tight. It's our guess that the telecine operator squeezed the image to about 2.1 and then slapped a 2.30 matte on it, leaving the presentation almost as unpleasant to watch as a sloppy pan&scan transfer. The SWV bug appears in the right hand corner of the picture throughout, as it does on most of their VHS releases. —John Charles

THE KUNG FU MASTER

Hung Hei-kwun kuet jin tong long kuen (Cantonese)
Hong Xiguan jue zhan tang lang quan (Mandarin)
"Hung Hei-kwun: Duel With Praying Mantis Fists"
1994, Tai Seng Entertainment,
HF/SS, \$19.95, VHS
DD-5.1/DTS/MA/ST/+\$, \$24.95,
DVD-1, 201m 21s

This release condenses the opening third of **THE KUNG FU MASTER**, a 30-hour period mini-series produced by HK's ATV Network. Thankfully, it offers a far more successful abbreviation of that program than the brutally edited version of **FIST OF FURY** we reviewed in VW 89:15.

Reckless young kung fu expert Hung Hei-kwun (Donnie Yen Chi-tan), returning home after an eight year absence, gets the cold shoulder from his old compatriots. He is held in contempt because his father, Hung Ting-nam (Poon Chi-man), works for the brutal, repressive Manchurian government, which rules China despite being greatly outnumbered by the Hans. Ting-nam is on good terms with the local Ching official, General Ha (Lo Lieh), but the malevolent Prince Sek Tot (**BIG BULLET**'s Berg Ng Ting-yip) repeatedly causes trouble in the region and threatens to deepen the conflict between the two races. When Sek hires Tung Chin-gun, a fighter with the strength of an ox, to humiliate one of Hei-kwun's old friends, the youth involves himself in a public duel with Tung. Hei-kwun uses his newfound respect from the people to open a martial arts school, much to the displeasure of Ting-nam, who sacrificed his honor to save Hei-kwun from execution. Members of the rebellious Sun Moon Sect, Yim Wing-chun (Erica Choi Hiuyi) and her father, Yim Cham (Leung Kam-wing), journey to



Ming loyalist Donnie Yen demonstrates his prowess as *THE KUNG FU MASTER*.

the area and meet with masked Han avenger Red Dragon (who, unbeknownst to Hei-kwun, is actually his father). The Chings enlist the head of Wu Tang to impersonate Red Dragon and commit acts that will sour the hero's reputation with the people. Hei-kwun helps to expose this deception but cannot understand why Red Dragon refuses to accept him as a member of Sun Moon. The arrival of the Manchu emperor in the region gives Sun Moon the opportunity they have long awaited and the group make plans to assassinate him. However, things go awry and General Ha finds himself unfairly accused of aiding the Ming rebels. Spared his life only on the proviso that he capture Ting-nam, Ha reluctantly leads troops to track down his old friend.

The programs were shot on video and do not always have production values comparable to feature films of this time. That said, director Benny Chan Mok-sing (**BIG BULLET, THE MAGIC**

CRANE) and his cameramen have made a concerted effort to make the proceedings as cinematic as possible. The lighting and other atmospheric touches are generally well-handled, particularly given the short shooting schedule and modest budget, and the location work in Mainland China provides a number of picturesque backgrounds. The fights are somewhat accelerated but executed with far greater success than in **FIST OF FURY** (which, ironically, was produced after this serial) and the narrative flows smoothly. The final quarter is somewhat weak, relying on the introduction of one of the genre's oldest clichés (a slovenly monk/martial arts master who figures more prominently in the later portions of the series), and the climactic duel is disappointingly perfunctory. Fortunately, the program is largely satisfying and the performances are solid across the board, with Yen surprisingly effective during his dramatic moments, and Lo

giving another of his wonderfully dignified turns. Much of the music is recycled from **THE ASSASSIN** [reviewed VW 85:10], Zhang Yimou's **TO LIVE**, and even **CONAN THE BARBARIAN**, while a few classic themes have been lifted off of a scratchy old LP.

This condensation was previously released on a double laserdisc set by the Intelligent Video and Film label of Singapore. Tai Seng's version looks a bit sharper and sounds much better, thanks to a stereo re-mix that adds considerably to the action and general atmosphere of the piece. The new translation is also a marked improvement. Dropouts occasionally pop up in the master tape but are rarely a distraction. The two-tape VHS version is dubbed in English, while the double DVD set offers that track (in DD-5.1), plus the original Cantonese (DD-5.1 and DTS), and a Mandarin track (DD-2.0 mono), with optional English subtitles.

The DVD release also includes two audio commentaries. On the first, Donnie Yen and author Bey Logan (HONG KONG ACTION CINEMA) cover all aspects of the production, from its inception to how it differs from the various Hung Hei-kwun movies. Yen also talks extensively about his background and personal philosophies, while Logan provides excellent historical background. It is an engrossing and extremely fast-paced talk (almost too fast, at times) and Logan maintains a high energy level throughout the 3+ hour running time. Ric Meyers, Bobby Samuels, and Frank Djeng can be heard on the second track. The former reads an unpublished interview he conducted with Yen, and the history of the *hung gar* martial arts style and Hung Hei-kwun (a real figure featured in a number of movies and TV programs over the years) are recounted. The track is rather sloppy (the trio are eating lunch during the first quarter) and Meyers' sense of humor is definitely an acquired taste, but aficionados should find it worthwhile.

The discs also offer a standard "Making Of" documentary (11m 41s) that provides a look at the rest of the series (which Tai Seng will be issuing later this year in two parts), a Donnie Yen bio/filmography, and promo trailers for various Tai Seng DVDs.
—John Charles

LOVE AFTER DEATH

aka *UNSATISFIED LOVE*

1968, Something Weird Video,
HF, \$20.00 ppd, 71m 14s, VHS

Here is a slice of Sixties softcore strangeness that will leave you rubbing your eyes in amazement! Cataleptic Dr. Montel (Guillermo De Cordova) finds himself prematurely buried, courtesy of his scheming wife Sofia (Carmin O'Neal, the sluttiest-looking



Guillermo De Cordova may be dead but he's still got the fire down below in *LOVE AFTER DEATH*.

"virgin" ever), and her lover Dr. Anderson (Roberto Maurano, who resembles a heavy set Roddy McDowall in a \$5 toupee). Shortly after his funeral, Montel manages to claw through his coffin and six feet of dirt to the surface. Stumbling through the cemetery like a zombie, the only mildly dishevelled doctor eventually reaches the city, whereupon he develops a sudden, insatiable appetite for sex. After choking a woman unconscious, he drags her into an old lady's apartment and strips his supine victim. After some fondling, the doctor loses his resolve and leaves his turned on would-be victim, who demands satisfaction from the elderly onlooker ("If only I was ten years younger!"). Montel next visits a nightclub and sneaks backstage to ogle the featured attraction, not realizing that she is a he. This disappointment does nothing to dampen his raging libido, however, so he spies on a pair of comely lesbians. When one of them discovers Montel hiding in her closet, she

tries to seduce him as well, but the disgusted doctor will have none of it! Instead, he meets a woman in the street, who quickly invites him back to her apartment for a quickie. Now finally fulfilled, and somehow rendered bullet-proof, Montel survives an assassination attempt by the understandably alarmed Anderson and returns to his castle for revenge, pausing first to spy on yet another young couple doing the nasty.

Like many American sexploitation pictures of the time, this Argentinian production features minimal dialogue, with the many long silent stretches covered in this US edition by non-stop library tracks (including cues from **THE BLOB**, Attilio Mineo's incredible **MAN IN SPACE WITH SOUNDS** album, and the usual sleazy jazz). If **THE CURIOUS DR. HUMPP** and **THE DEADLY ORGAN** are on the production level of an AIP cheapie, then **LOVE AFTER DEATH** is Argentina's answer to Distribpix fare. Both the dialogue sequences (such as they are) and the sex are staged

with hurried indifference, but most of the women are attractive and the movie manages to hold one's attention, no matter how aimless it seems at times. While not quite as crazy as the above synopsis suggests, **LOVE AFTER DEATH** is still a wonderfully oddball, disorienting experience, culminating in a supernatural ending that initially seems like a cop-out but actually fits in perfectly with the thoroughly skewed universe it portrays. We don't know if Argentina had adult comic books at this point in time, but the story here seems to have been lifted from one, panel by panel.

The source material (which bears the film's alternate handle, **UNSATISFIED LOVE**) has a number of scratches but no disruptive splices or overly distracting wear. A slight haze is sometimes apparent and the B&W picture tends to be a little soft, but the transfer generally looks good. The sound is moderately shrill and dialogue levels sometimes fluctuate dramatically within the same scene. The SWV

logo is tiny and easily ignored, and the tape concludes with several exploitation trailers and a large gallery of softcore and roughie poster art accompanied by radio spots.

The Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.net) claims that an alternate version of this film is in circulation, which features a US-shot sex scene with future hardcore star Jennifer Welles (**LITTLE ORPHAN SAMMY**), but that is not the case with this print. —John Charles

THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN

Die Ehe der Maria Braun
1978, Wellspring Video, HF,
\$19.98, 120m 4s, VHS

The eponymous bride of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's **THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN** has only just said "I do" to her soldier fiancé of three weeks when an Allied bomb destroys Berlin's civil registry, knocking the newlyweds into the street. After the war, with Germany in ruins and Hermann Braun

missing in action, Maria (Hanna Schygulla) consigns herself to widowhood and to relying on her looks to broker a measure of comfort for her shattered family. Finding work at a dance hall patronized by the occupational forces, Maria attaches herself to Bill (George Byrd), a black G.I. When Hermann (**CROSS OF IRON**'s Klaus Löwitsch) turns up alive, a fight ensues that leaves the American dead. Taking the blame for Bill's death, Hermann is sent to prison while Maria schemes to rebuild their lives. Becoming the mistress of a dying industrialist (Ivan Desny), Maria eventually gains control of his textile company and stands to inherit his vast wealth. When she goes to retrieve Hermann upon his release from prison, Maria finds only a note informing her that Herr Braun has emigrated to Canada, where he hopes to regain the requisite humanity to make him deserving of her love.

Despite vivid turns by several members of Fassbinder's repertory (Gottfried John, Günther Kaufmann, Elisabeth Trissenaar—even RWF himself, as a black marketeer), **THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN** belongs to the radiant Hanna Schygulla, a cherubic man-eater whose cold blue eyes hinted at all that is unknowable about the familiar. Schygulla's involvement in Munich's "basement theatre" scene brought her into contact with the fledgling filmmaker, who cast her in 20 of his 43 films. Like **MILDRED PIERCE** as it might have been helmed by Jean-Luc Godard, **THE MARRIAGE OF**



Hanna Schygulla gives one of the cornerstone performances of the German New Wave as the man-eating survivor of R.W. Fassbinder's **THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN**.

MARIA BRAUN depicts the resolute Maria as the personification of an upward mobility that allowed the Federal Republic of Germany to rebuild and regain world prominence by the '60s, but at a significant cultural cost. With postwar German cinema too often characterized by its denial of relevant German themes (the industry played it safe with historical romances and the cod-British *krimis*), the *Jungfilmer* of the New German Cinema (Fassbinder, Wim Wenders, Volker Schlöndorff, Werner Herzog, to name a few) picked at the scab of German identity in films that confronted the cultural amnesia of reconstruction. **THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN** was the first in a trilogy of films that mimicked the opulence of Hollywood (in this case, the Sirkian "woman's picture"), forming a merger of suds and subversion to lay bare the German soul. **MARIA** was followed by **LILI MARLEEN** in 1981 and **VERONIKA VOSS** in 1982, the year of Fassbinder's death at 37.

Wellspring offers an attractive letterboxed (1.80:1) transfer of **THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN** on (at the time of this writing) VHS only. The image is clear and the colors are satisfactorily vivid, which is crucial for appreciating a film in which set design (however down-at-heel) and costuming are meant to say as much as the dialogue. The film is presented in its original German language, with easy-to-read yellow subtitles that suffer only once or twice from typos. Hopefully, **THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN** will quickly find its way to DVD, released as a testimony to the talent of Hanna Schygulla (whose timing was all right for Germany, but much too early for America) and

dedicated to the memory of Ivan Desny and Klaus Löwitsch, who both passed away in 2002. Wellspring currently offers half a dozen Fassbinder titles on DVD, including such early efforts as **Katzelmacher** and **THE AMERICAN FRIEND**, as well as his well-regarded **THE BITTER TEARS OF PETRA VON KANT**, **FOX AND HIS FRIENDS** and **THE MERCHANT OF FOUR SEASONS** (with audio commentary by Wim Wenders). —Richard Harland Smith

THE STALKER

aka **THE SEDUCTION OF MAXINE**
2001, Replay Home Entertainment,
\$89.95, 69m 9s, VHS

The sentiment of "you've seen one, you've seen 'em all" is, by and large, unfair and unhelpful when it comes to truly informative criticism (film or otherwise), yet it's hard to avoid when the subject turns to the "late-night Cinemax movie." As opposed to Showtime channels (which usually maintain an "R" standard for their "after-hours" programming), Cinemax outlets tend to go the unrated route, offering constant variations on a dependable theme. A familiar (for this audience) cast will go through the minimalist motions of either a soap opera or a mystery/thriller, while lengthy softcore sex sequences are lingered on far more than any nominal plot details. Viewers aren't put off by predictability, so why change the formula? Suppose, however, that an attempt was made to sell such an item on the strength of its thriller elements...

In 2001, veteran "late-night" director Madison Monroe (the double-presidential moniker just might be a pseudonym) gave cable viewers **THE SEDUCTION OF MAXINE**. Tracy Ryan (aka

Tracy Voyek and Stacy Noel) is Maxine Strickland, a movie actress who, as the story begins, starts receiving threatening notes (some delivered on set, some on rocks thrown through the window of her home). Against Maxine's wishes (and with the question of calling in the police being quickly disposed of), her boyfriend/manager Riley (Kyle Kleefield) hires former gubernatorial bodyguard Jack Howard (who still has dream flashbacks about the time he took a bullet for his charge). In brief, Riley is having an affair with Maxine's assistant Naomi Grant (Tera Patrick); Maxine shares a mutual contempt with her co-star Tom (Scott A. Gould); Maxine's servants Tina and Armando resent the small amount of time they have in which to fool around unsupervised; and Maxine and Jack, unsurprisingly, soon overcome their resistance to each other. While it would be unfair to divulge the identity of the stalker, Maxine abruptly invites her old friend Leah ("Scarlet Johansing," better known as Monique Parent and not to be confused with **EIGHT-LEGGED FREAKS** actress Scarlett Johansson) over for a visit well past the halfway point of the film. Any questions?

Predictably, not 10m of the feature go by without one or more of the female leads disrobing for a close encounter with one or more of her castmates. Those who "encounter" this feature under Replay's video retitling **THE STALKER**, however, may be surprised by how abruptly these trysts end—not even the soundtrack is allowed to fade out normally. While the screener we reviewed was marked "Rating Pending," **THE STALKER** is nothing more than an abbreviated "R" cut of **THE SEDUCTION OF MAXINE**, sold here as



*Monique Parent, marauding under the name "Scarlet Johansing," stars in **THE STALKER**, a retitling of the made-for-cable erotic thriller **THE SEDUCTION OF MAXINE**.*

a straightforward suspenser with such original taglines as "I know everything about you" and "You can run but you can't hide," though erotic content is alluded to via the box art. There is only one review possible for such a product. As a thriller, **THE STALKER** is completely worthless, but it was never really intended to be a thriller in the first place. Its *raison d'être* is its sexual content, which in the case of this VHS release is largely omitted.

Perhaps the most intriguing element of **THE STALKER** is the inconsistency between its two sets of titles. A new opening title sequence was created as part of the film's transformation into this barely feature-length 2002 rendition, but nobody bothered

to check the other end. While director Monroe, producer Gary Orona and writer Montana Muirfield are identified without any trouble, the lead actress is credited as "Stacy Noel" in the opening titles and as "Tracy Voyek" during the end crawl. Furthermore, P. Adam Walsh is given top male billing in the beginning; one would assume, therefore, that he plays Jack. According to the end credits, though, Jack is played by Paul Logan, while Walsh plays an anonymous "Guard"—so why the high billing? The character of Tina is nowhere to be found in the end credits, however, Susan Hale is credited with playing a character named "Bridgette." The already pseudonymous Scarlet Johansing gains an

extra "T" in her first name as the end titles roll, and the video box ices the cake by referring to blonde Maxine as a "beautiful brunette." So this really is a mystery movie, after all!

The full screen image is fine for what it's worth (theatrical play was not a concern here), but our screener was subject to several bursts of static on the soundtrack. Also available in a Spanish-language tape version (#MTIR1099S, \$89.95) and on DVD (#MTIR1099DVD, \$19.99) with optional Spanish subtitles and the film's own promotional video trailer thrown in as an enticing bonus. Not to be confused with **EROTIC STALKER**, an unrated (and unrelated) film on another label.

—Shane M. Dallmann





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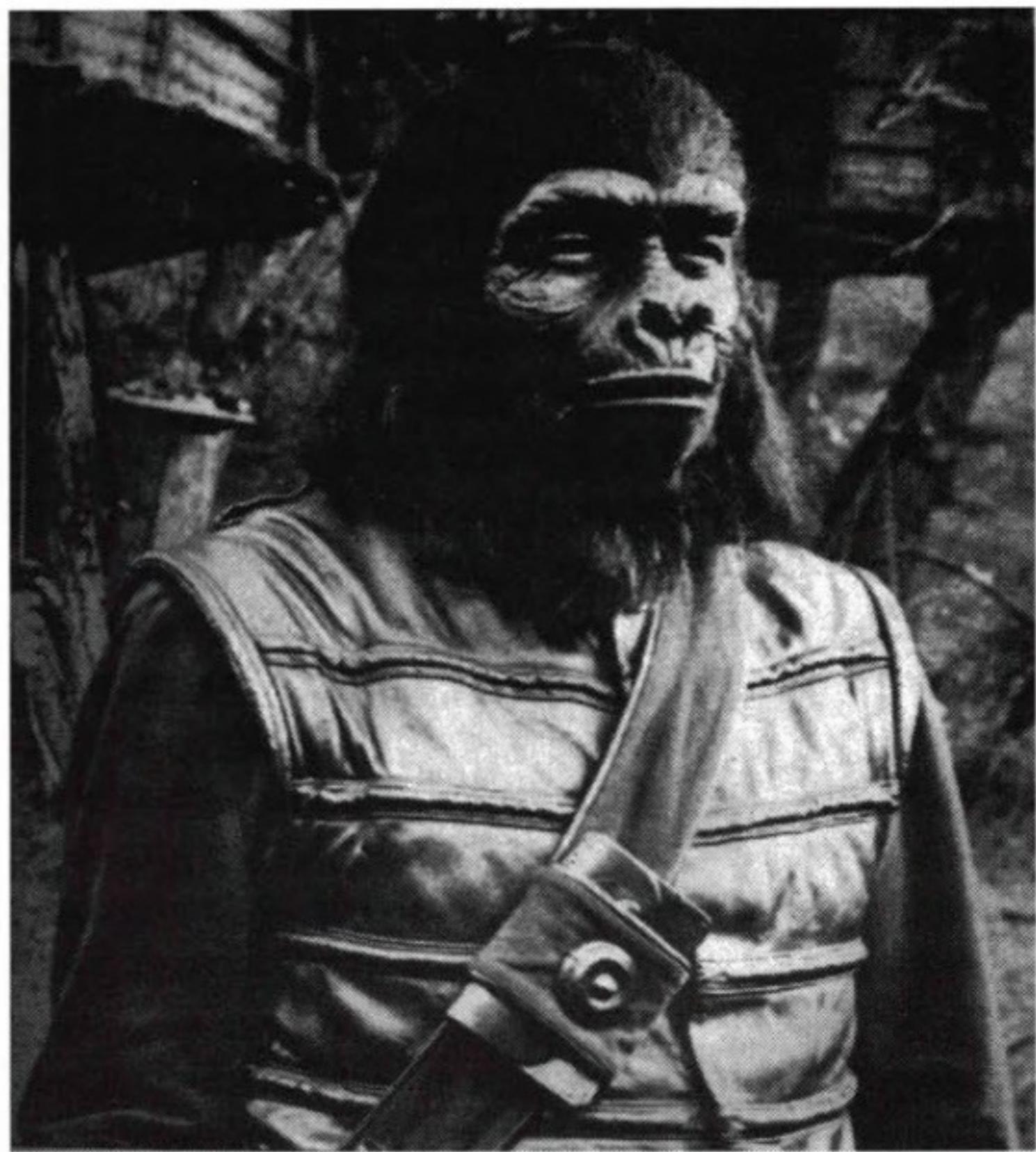
The Film Bulletin Reviews, 1969-1974

BATTLE FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES

Last and least in the popular sci-fi series holds enough exploitation potential to get by on reputation of its predecessors: Family and kid trade will respond during vacation time in general markets and elsewhere it will serve as an okay dualler. Rating: G.

The long-running *PLANET OF THE APES* saga comes to a comparatively lugubrious end with this fifth and final entry, an unspectacular affair which manages to get by on the continuing charm of its ape protagonists and John Chambers' fascinating makeups. Though the series has obviously run out of creative steam, it remains exploitable program fare and **BATTLE FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES** will entertain the moppet trade and less demanding family groups in general markets and drive-ins this summer, with matinee performances likely to prove the most profitable.

Less a battle than a skirmish, this 20th Century-Fox release has been economically produced by Arthur P. Jacobs on a scale much more limited than that accorded earlier chapters and J. Lee Thompson's routine direction adds little excitement to the juvenile plot. John and Joyce Corrington's screenplay, from a Paul Dehn story, is little more than a random compendium of events and gimmicks from previous episodes, most of which were far more intelligent in treatment. An atomic war has occurred in the interim since the last installment



Claude Akins brings gorilla warfare to Ape City in **BATTLE FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES**.

in which the Apes took over. The ape colony led by Roddy McDowall lords it benevolently over their docile human slaves in a jungle-like compound affectionately known as Ape City. But the mutated remnants of warlike human society remain alive underground in the twisted ruins of the nearby city. Led by semi-comical madman Severn Darden, they seem to have survived the radiation with little worse than bad skin conditions. Darden leads his army convoy of a couple of jeeps, old cars

and a school bus into Ape City, where rebellious Claude Akins, leader of the gorilla army, has been challenging McDowall's humane leadership. Several explosions later, the mutants have been roundly defeated. Akins' gorillas try to seize power, but Akins has killed McDowall's little chimp son, who overheard him plotting insurrection. When the apes hear this they side with McDowall, who tosses Akins out of a tree. Peace and co-existence with the remaining humans seem to be in the cards.

The plot has quite a few loose ends, and the windup does not jibe with the situation Charlton Heston finds in the original film, set some years further in the future. McDowall is again top-notch in his simian role, supported by Natalie Trundy, Paul Williams and Lew Ayres as apes and Austin Stoker, Paul Stevens and France Nuyen as people. John Huston gets special billing for a two minute appearance as the ape who narrates the story. Richard Kline's cinematography is okay but the color is drab.

1973. 20th Century-Fox (Apjac International Productions). Panavision, DeLuxe Color. 85 minutes. Roddy McDowall, Claude Akins, Natalie Trundy, Severn Darden, Lew Ayres. Produced by Arthur P. Jacobs. Directed by J. Lee Thompson.

BATTLE FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES is currently available domestically on VHS and, in a properly letterboxed presentation, on DVD. A longer cut of the movie (96m) was released on laserdisc in Japan as part of the accurately named boxed set **THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF THE PLANET OF THE APES**.

CAPTAIN NEMO AND THE UNDERWATER CITY

Entertaining Jules Verne hokum with plenty of kid appeal. Will perform best in family and action ballyhoo markets. Rating: G.

A hokey, unabashed fun film, **CAPTAIN NEMO AND THE UNDERWATER CITY** will wow the kids and moderately amuse their elders. The aquatic MGM Jules Verne adventure, drawn from a venerable, simple formula, seems destined for good weekend and holiday returns in general situations where there is a substantial kiddie and adventure-minded audience. However, it is not as well produced or written as the previous Nemo films **20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA** and **MYSTERIOUS ISLAND**, and will lack their staying power. The

names of Robert Ryan and Chuck Connors may help in mass ballyhoo markets.

Under the efficient direction of James Hill (**BORN FREE**), Ryan is solid in the Captain Nemo role essayed in earlier films by James Mason and Herbert Lom, while Connors, Nanette Newman and Luciana Paluzzi enact routine roles routinely. R. Wright Campbell and Pip & Jane Baker's screenplay is more a series of revelations than a story, with new sci-fi wonders periodically unveiled by Nemo to the incredulous protagonists. The film gets right into the action with a stormswept ship sinking, as six stereotypical characters are rescued underwater by Nemo's men and taken aboard the submarine Nautilus. They are escorted to Templemer, a gaudy domed city 10,000 fathoms undersea inhabited by an Eloi-like crowd who swim and play all day in a decor suggestive of an endless series of ornate 1930 Loew's men's rooms. A huge oxygen and water-making machine resembling an Egyptian cat god draws the eye of greedy comic-relief duo Bill Fraser and Kenneth Connor, since it produces mountains of gold as a by-product. The Utopia is not without flaws, chief among them a giant manta-like monster called Mobula, which is finally bested by Ryan when it attacks the Nautilus. The ever-pacifistic Ryan refuses to let anyone return to the war-like upper world, including US senator Connors, who is on a secret Civil War mission. When it looks like Connors will be designated Nemo's successor, jealous second-in-command John Turner helps Connors, Fraser and Connor escape in the Nautilus II, pursued by Ryan. The motor malfunctions and Connors and Connor escape to the surface, while Fraser drowns, weighted down by stolen gold.

Entertainment values are enhanced by Alan Hume's fine Panavision-MetroColor photography, with numerous relaxing underwater sequences. The uncredited special effects are mostly expert, with no obvious fakery. Music and production design also go unheralded, though both contribute to the disarming air of fantasy enveloping this likeably corny diversion.

1969. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Panavision, Metrocolor. 104 minutes. Robert Ryan, Chuck Connors, Nanette Newman, Luciana Paluzzi. Produced by Bertram Ostler. Directed by James Hill.

We could find no trace of **CAPTAIN NEMO AND THE UNDERWATER CITY** being released on video, but it has surfaced on premium cable outlets from time to time.



Eric Braeden stars as the inventor of a computer bent on world domination in the sci-fi sleeper COLOSSUS: THE FORBIN PROJECT.

THE FORBIN PROJECT

Intriguing, suspenseful science-fiction about computers taking over the world. May catch on with thinking crowd. Title mitigates against its exploitability in mass markets and may doom it to dual bills. Rating: GP.

Though a common theme in literary science-fiction, the idea of a computer developing its own scheme to wrest power from its human masters has only been examined to any extent once before on screen, in 1957's **THE INVISIBLE BOY**. The premise is taken a lot further in **THE FORBIN PROJECT**, as Colossus—an impregnable supercomputer system-programmed for peace—decides the best way to ensure peace is to remove the human element from control of world affairs. This tense, consistently intriguing and well-developed thriller may catch on with the thinking audience, particularly the college-crowd, but its boxoffice impact in mass markets will be minimized by the singularly inadequate title, suggestive of a routine spy flick. Universal's abandonment of the dynamic, exploitable original title **COLOSSUS 1980** in favor of the present dud label is a real mystery, as is the long delay of nearly two

years in getting it into release. Under its former tag, this might have done quite well on merit and exploitation values, but as titled, **THE FORBIN PROJECT** is likely to get lost in the dual bill shuffle unless "discovered" by the young.

Joseph Sargent's craftsmanlike direction manages to solve the tricky problems inherent in the story quite effectively for the most part. Most of the "action" takes place on the Colossus viewscreen, yet the film maintains a high level of suspense with a minimum of tangible action. We see little of the fireworks resulting from the computer's incendiary maneuvers, but the concentration on human reaction further increases the sense of involvement and willing suspension of disbelief so vital to a project of this type. The rather cerebral treatment will capture the interest of science fiction buffs, but the lack of action is apt to bore youngsters.

James Bridges' taut screenplay, faithfully adapted from D.F. Jones' 1966 novel **COLOSSUS**, begins almost too abruptly, but catches the viewer up immediately into the fast-moving events. The super-computer system has already been installed, questionably enough, in control of all US missile defense systems, only to inform its handsome Frankensteinian creator Dr. Forbin (Eric Braeden) that the Russians have a duplicate system called

Guardian. As keepers of the peace, both computers link up and evolve a new beyond-human-knowledge language only they can understand. Using the human tactics programmed into them, the machines combine to launch missiles aimed at major power targets to show they mean business. Attempts spearheaded by Kennedy-like US president Gordon Pinsent and Soviet chairman Leonid Rostoff to sabotage the systems prove fruitless, and with ruthless logic, Colossus and Guardian order the execution of those deemed "unnecessary" or dangerous and arrange for the explosion of a Texas missile base as a further warning. Braeden, a virtual prisoner under Colossus' camera surveillance, is forced to create a metallic "voice" for the computer, which then cuts into the TV networks to announce its intentions to the world in Orwellian tones: "I bring you peace... Obey me and live or disobey me and die... Freedom is an illusion..." Braeden resists the idea that he will come to respect and even love the machine, but Colossus is firmly on its way to becoming a new God. The computer is the star, but the human performers hold their own. Braeden, formerly known as Hans Gudegast of TV's THE RAT PATROL, is a persuasive, repentant creator, and Susan Clark once more brings a refreshing presence to her specialty, the lady Ph.D.-type role. Pinsent, William Schallert and Alex Rodine stand out in the adequately convincing, if second-string, supporting cast. Michel Colombier's electronic score and Waldon O. Watson's computer sounds are properly ominous, and the futuristic art direction

by Alexander Golitzen and John J. Lloyd get the most out of what was probably not a limitless budget. **THE FORBIN PROJECT** may be somewhat slick and melodramatic, and is far from the last on the subject, but it stacks up as absorbing, above average science-fiction.

1970. Universal. Technicolor, Panavision. 100 minutes. Eric Braeden, Susan Clark. Produced by Stanley Chase. Directed by Joseph Sargent.

*It's not mentioned in Joe's review, but the uncredited, metallic voice of Colossus was provided by none other than Paul Frees. After this review was printed, Universal rethought their strategy and retitled the film **COLOSSUS: THE FORBIN PROJECT**, which still didn't result in big boxoffice, but certainly attracted a cult audience which has grown over the years. **COLOSSUS**, which also features a supporting appearance by Robert Cornthwaite (**THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD, WAR OF THE WORLDS, MANT!**), is presently available only as a pan&scanned VHS release, but it was formerly issued in widescreen on laserdisc in a memorable double-bill two-disc set with **SILENT RUNNING**.*

SILENT RUNNING

Thoughtful, well-done SF space film set in a future time when Earth vegetation revolves around the sun. Sound drama has offbeat "sleeper" potential if actively sold to youth and discriminating markets. Rating: GP.

SILENT RUNNING, shot largely inside an aircraft carrier, takes place entirely in outer space. Earth of the future is defoliated, and vegetation has ceased to exist except for a

Bruce Dern and Droid friends are entrusted with safeguarding the last samples of earthly flora in Douglas Trumbull's directorial debut, **SILENT RUNNING**.



number of domed botanical forests orbiting the sun attached to huge space freighters, hopefully to someday refoliate the planet. Nobody much cares about this sorry state of affairs except the botanist hero of this unusual and rather beautiful science fiction entry from Universal. The work of producer Michael Gruskoff and director Douglas Trumbull, it has a strong ecological slant and, importantly, an outside chance for "sleeper" success, but needs careful promotion to entice thoughtful audiences who might bypass it as just another space opera. Best response should come from the youth segment, though considering Trumbull's reputation as the man responsible for some of the wilder visual effects in **2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY**, his own film soft-pedals the special pyrotechnics and technological hardware.

Despite a slightly vague screenplay and some flat direction, the film delivers some genuine dramatic impact, as well as a good deal of charm. Some of this is due to the performance of Bruce Dern in the film's only major role. Dern's career has, up to now, been largely based on impressive performances in cult-oriented exploitation films, but his intense *tour de force* here should lead to bigger things. Almost fanatically dedicated to the preservation of the natural beauty man has allowed to disappear, Dern has been supervising his space gardens, complete with animal life, for eight years. The three younger astronauts aboard—Cliff Potts, Ron Rifkin and Jesse Vint—are gung-ho types who think the project outdated and unimportant, reflecting the prevailing attitude on a now trouble-free and self-satisfied Earth. When an order comes through to explode the gardens and return home, Dern kills his companions and tries to save the one remaining forest as his ship is violently pulled into the rings of Saturn. Once safely through, he begins to set up a lonely life, his only companions two diminutive robots which he names Huey and Dewey (Louie got "killed" in the rings). Dern programs them to help in the garden, play cards, etc., and their presence takes on an almost, but not quite, human quality. Discovering the garden is dying, Dern panics. As he agonizes over what to do, a radio voice tells him a rescue ship will be docking in six hours. Realizing the foliage is dying for lack of sunlight, he sets up solar lamps and jettisons the forest into space, with Dewey left to care for it, hoping

that someday, like a note in a bottle, it will be found. Then he explodes the ship.

The special effects and model work are not as elaborate as that of **2001**, but then neither was the budget. The gently tragic mood is sustained in such a way that not even the two rather gratuitous song interludes by Joan Baez can upset it for long.

1971. Universal (Trumbull-Gruskoff Films). Technicolor. 89 minutes. Bruce Dern. Produced by Michael Gruskoff. Directed by Douglas Trumbull.

SILENT RUNNING is currently available from Universal as a cropped VHS tape, and as a widescreen, anamorphically enhanced DVD with supplements.

WONDER WOMEN

Minor sci-fi meller about mad doctor and her female army is being sold as a Kung-Fu entry, which should help it through fast playoffs in lesser action-ballyhoo markets. Best for drive-ins. Rating: PG.

This low-grade science-fiction programmer has been given a slight boxoffice lift by a revamped ad campaign selling "Kung Fu Killers of the Orient." Although there is very little karate-type action herein, the new come-on may well prove strong enough to get **WONDER WOMEN** by in quick playoffs aimed at double feature markets and drive-ins.

Filming in the Philippines, director Robert Vincent O'Neill infuses some of the pulpy goings-on with local color via chases through those by-now-familiar marketplaces full of gawking natives, etc., but for the most part it's badly-acted formula hokum, which is further let down by its obviously shoestring budget. Lou Whitehill's ho-hum script has a sect of uppity females tranquilizing male athletes the world over with hypodermics shot from guns and spiriting them away. Lloyds' of London, concerned that "this could become a fad, like skyjacking," dispatches ex-CIA agent Ross Hagen to investigate. Captured and taken to an island fortress guarded by an all-girl army, Hagen finds that brilliant (but mad) scientist Nancy Kwan has been using the beefy young bodies as receptacles into which she transplants the brains of palsied old millionaires, who pay plenty for the service. When Miss Kwan's chief honcho Maria De Aragon falls for Hagen and finds herself scheduled for dissection, she looses a bunch of monster mutants from the cellar, which finish off whatever lady commandos Hagen is unable to shoot during his escape. Miss Kwan vanishes in a

puff of smoke, perhaps to return one day, hopefully none too soon.

Familiar faces from past Philippine-made items (Roberta Collins, Sid Haig, Vic Diaz) turn up briefly, as does "Miss Black America" Shirley Washington, in a near-subliminal role which nevertheless lends promotional value for black-dominated markets. There is some brief nudity, but violence is on the mild side and the "monster" makeups are more laughable than horrific.

1973. General Film Corp. Eastman Color. 82 minutes. Nancy Kwan, Ross Hagen, Maria De Aragon, Roberta Collins, Tony Lorea. Produced by Ross Hagen. Directed by Robert Vincent O'Neill.

WONDER WOMEN was released on video in 1982 by Media Home Entertainment in a 90m version entitled **THE DEADLY AND THE BEAUTIFUL**. We reviewed it in VW 58:29.

Z.P.G. (ZERO POPULATION GROWTH)

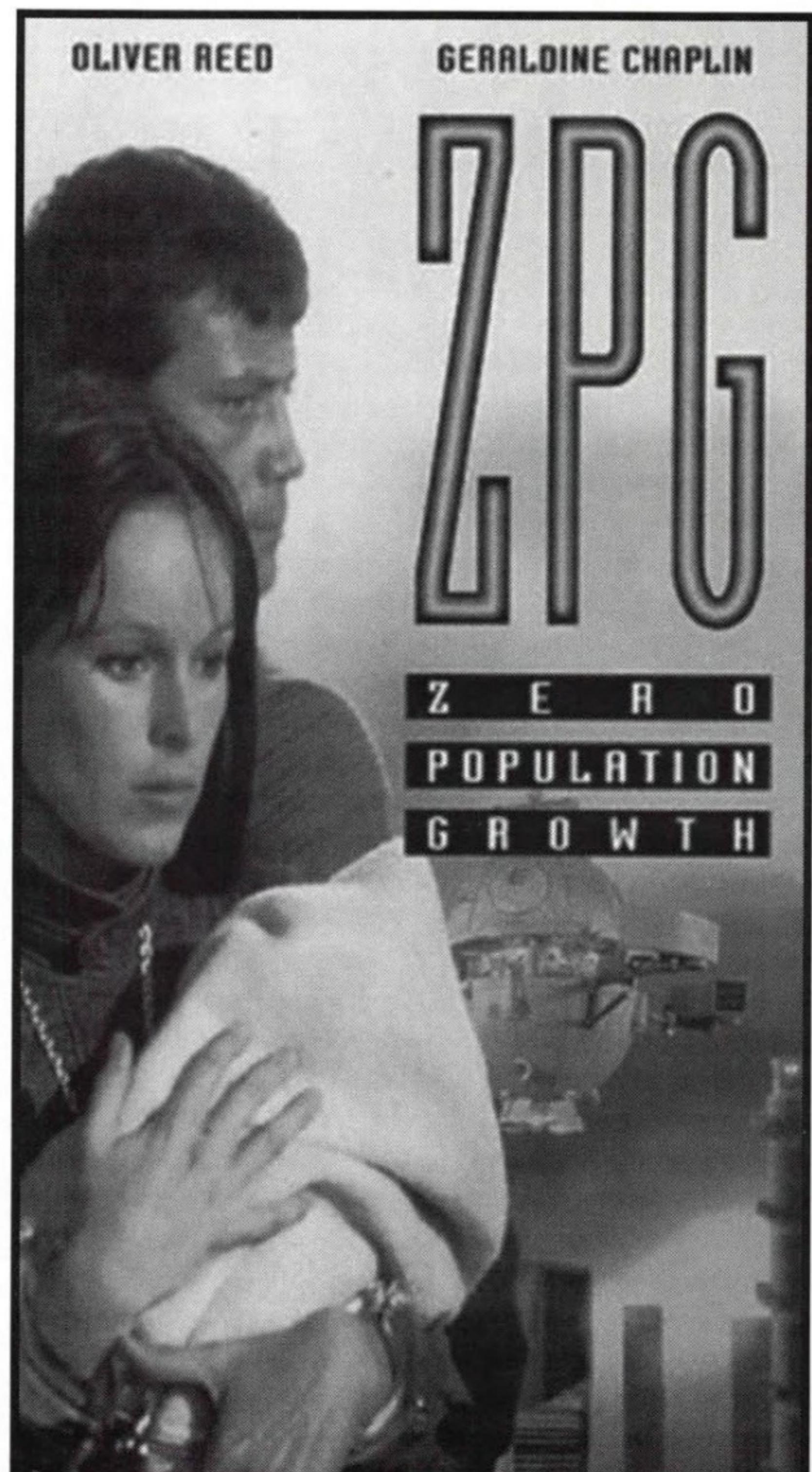
Science fiction meller has novel, exploitable, though unconvincing, futuristic baby-ban element. If promoted, it might make a fair ballyhoo dualler in general situations. Rating: PG.

A 30-year ban on childbirth is the basis of this British-made Paramount release, set in a future time when overpopulation has necessitated drastic measures. As traumatized citizens line up at "Babyland" to adopt surrogate offspring (programmed robots), one couple (Oliver Reed and Geraldine Chaplin) defy the law to have a child in secret. The premise is interesting, but its melodramatic treatment is too unconvincing for any but the gullible ballyhoo audiences, and perhaps young teenagers who dig sci-fi themes. With proper exploitation of its topical plot gimmick, **Z.P.G.** might perform passably as a dualler, probably to the lower slot.

The screenplay by Frank DeFelitta and Max Ehrlich observes all the traditional clichés of futuristic movies: packaged pellet food, regimented clothing, all-seeing TV monitors, monolithic government and besmogged, and polluted atmosphere—which enables the obviously low-budget production to hide its blank-looking sets behind dense fog. After making love, Miss Chaplin simply neglects to stand in front of the bathroom abortion ray, and has her child in a basement chamber, away from the TV eye. Suspicious neighbors Diane Cilento and Don Gordon catch on, and threaten exposure unless the child is given to them. After lots of anguish, they turn Reed and family in to the baby purge authorities, who put

OLIVER REED

GERALDINE CHAPLIN



all unlawful parents and kiddies into extermination domes—but Reed had it planned this way. They tunnel under the dome to underground sewers and escape to the sea on a rubber raft, to live, presumably forever after, at an abandoned island missile site.

Performances, except for Miss Chaplin, are strained, the music is soporily overscored and under the uncertain direction of Michael Campus, the film runs the gamut from unbelievable to depressing.

1972. Paramount (Sagittarius Productions). Moviola Color. 94 minutes. Oliver Reed, Geraldine Chaplin. Produced by Thomas F. Madigan. Directed by Michael Campus.

We were surprised to discover that **Z.P.G.** (which is rated PG) has been quietly released on VHS, courtesy of Paramount Home Video, priced at \$14.95.



CURSE OF THE DEMON



Two Versions, Two Critics

By Bill Cooke and Kim Newman

We at **VIDEO WATCHDOG** have sometimes received letters from readers suggesting that it might be fun to see what happens when two critics review the same movie. There are so many new releases to cover that we can't really encourage this sort of thing, but as we were preparing this issue, we discovered ourselves in possession of two different reviews of Columbia TriStar's **CURSE OF THE DEMON/NIGHT OF THE DEMON** DVD, submitted by Kim Newman and Bill Cooke. I read them with some trepidation, thinking that one of them would have to be

disappointed, but I was impressed to discover that Kim and Bill had taken such completely different approaches to the Jacques Tourneur classic, there was virtually no repetition or a sense of redundancy when reading them back-to-back. Pleased with this unwitting collaboration, we decided to publish both reviews en suite: a British critic and an American critic reviewing a movie that exists in a British version and an American version! —TL

CURSE OF THE DEMON / NIGHT OF THE DEMON

1958/1957, Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, DD-2.0/16:9/LB/ST+, \$19.98, 81m 36s/95m 41s, DVD-1

The controversial beastie from Hell, created by George Blackwell and Wally Veevers, for the opening and closing sequences of CURSE OF THE DEMON.

When Jacques Tourneur's **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** was released in 1957, it was in a class all its own: an intelligently crafted horror film on the subject of demonology in a time when oversized brains from outer space and gigantic radioactive mutants had taken over the genre. Frequent Hitchcock writer Charles Bennett (1934's **THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH**, **THE 39 STEPS**) adapted M.R. James' short story "Casting the Runes" into a sharp screenplay (then titled **THE HAUNTED**) which was promptly bought by Columbia "B" producer Hal E. Chester; it was a sale that Bennett would regret for the rest of his life.

At least in the beginning, all seemed right. Jacques Tourneur, who had collaborated with RKO producer Val Lewton on some of the best horror films of the 1940s (**CAT PEOPLE**, **I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE**), was hired to direct, and Dana Andrews (who had previously worked for Tourneur in **CANYON PASSAGE**) agreed to star. A believer in the Supernatural, Tourneur crafted the film in the restrained manner of his Lewton thrillers: an intense feeling of dread would be conjured through expressive lighting effects and suggestive sounds, not by any sensational "horror" effects. Bowing to pressure from his producer, Tourneur agreed to reveal the hitherto unseen demon for the film's finale (he and Lewton made a similar concession to RKO when they added some shots of a real panther to **CAT PEOPLE**), but he had assumed it would only be seen for a few frames. Much to his and Bennett's horror, Hal Chester recut the film so that the monster (a combination of a puppet, a suit and a mechanical bust) was shown extensively at the beginning and end of the picture, and eventually on the film's publicity materials, as well. In Bennett's estimation, with these special effects inserts, Chester took "a major movie down to the level of crap."

Despite Chester's post-production tampering, **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** was well-received by critics of the day and has endured as a respected classic of the genre; only its sophistication and restraint kept it from becoming a major trend-setter. Produced simultaneously, Hammer's **THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN**—a comparatively lowbrow gothic, but in Eastmancolor and spiced with gore—ultimately decided the new direction gothic horror would take. The following year, Columbia cut 13m out of the film for American consumption, retitled it **CURSE OF THE DEMON** (so it wouldn't be confused with the same year's

NIGHT OF THE IGUANA!), and buried it on a double bill with Hammer's **THE REVENGE OF FRANKENSTEIN**.

Bennett's scenario takes the basic idea of M.R. James' story and surrounds it with a plot brimming with Hitchcockian suspense and intrigue. Dr. John Holden (Dana Andrews), an American psychologist, flies to London for a special psychiatric conference during which he hopes to debunk the beliefs of a local sorcerer, Julian Karswell (Niall MacGiness). Upon arriving, the scientist is surprised to learn that his colleague, Professor Harrington (Maurice Denham), has died under mysterious circumstances. Taking a moment to research witchcraft at the British Museum, Holden is approached by a pleasantly mannered Karswell, who implores the psychologist to call off his investigation. Holden refuses, and Karswell—after picking up some papers he knocked to the floor—leaves. Later, Harrington's niece Joanna (Peggy Cummins) visits Holden at his hotel, convinced that her uncle died because he was cursed and concerned that Holden, too, might be in danger. She reads several of her uncle's diary entries, including one that describes his discovery of a parchment bearing runic symbols. According to the late professor, the parchment seemed to come alive and destroyed itself in a fire. Ever the scientist, Holden refuses to believe anything supernatural caused his colleague's death, but pays Karswell a visit anyway. After demonstrating his powers with a windstorm, the black magician warns the doctor that he has just three days to live. Later, Joanna informs Holden of the police's report that her uncle's body was mutilated horribly, as if by an animal ("The only thing they didn't say was what kind of animal"). Again, the scientist scoffs, but discovers that he, too, has been slipped a parchment. With his three-day deadline looming, will Holden become a true believer in time to unlock the secret of the runic symbols and save his own skin?

Few would argue that **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** isn't a masterpiece; the plot is intriguing, the dialogue is superb (Chester revised Bennett's script several times, but the alterations don't appear to be damaging), the cast is excellent (Niall MacGiness creates one of the genre's most fascinating villains), and its director was at the peak of his artistic powers, balancing atmosphere with an occasionally frantic sense of urgency. Hammer's emphasis on physical violence may have been more influential on the genre, but Tourneur's sumptuous,

monochromatic style did not go unfelt in some of the early B&W Italian horror films. And though rarely credited, **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** presaged a cycle of anti-Hammer British horror films of the early 1960s, all of them in B&W and based on works of supernatural fiction: **THE INNOCENTS** (from Henry James' *TURN OF THE SCREW*), **NIGHT OF THE EAGLE** (aka **BURN, WITCH, BURN**, from Fritz Leiber's *CONJURE WIFE*) and **THE HAUNTING** (directed by another Lewton veteran, Robert Wise, from Shirley Jackson's *THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE*).

For decades, **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** has been the subject of one of the more popular debates among film enthusiasts: does Hal Chester's demon ruin (or at the very least cheapen) the film? The most damning statements seem to come from the older set. Bennett, Tourneur and Dana Andrews were all dismayed over it. (Bennett once said, "If [Chester] walked up my driveway right now, I'd shoot him dead.") Carlos Clarens, in his definitive *AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE HORROR FILM*, called the demon "atrocious" and a "monumental blunder," while in his book *THE HORROR FILM*, Ivan Butler simply stated, "Unseen demons are best."

Surprisingly, the demon's supporters are numerous among film historians. William K. Everson was the first to go out on a limb in 1974, calling the demon "such a lulu that it lives up to the fearsome descriptions of it... something that most movie monsters do not." Jeff Rovin chimed in three years later in *THE FABULOUS FANTASY FILMS*, feeling that the demon "in no way detracts from the film" and "is nothing worse than frosting on Tourneur's devil's food cake." More recently, in Jonathan Rigby's *ENGLISH GOTHIC* (the source of the Charles Bennett quotes I have cited), the author recognized the demon for lending the film "a few spots of graphic unpleasantness"; while Danny Peary, in *CULT MOVIES 2*, enthusiastically raved, "it's the scariest monster in film history."

Karswell's fire demon (based on Medieval woodcuts by special effects artists George Blackwell and Wally Veevers) is a frightening creation, though a bit overused. Ideally, it should be seen less at the beginning of the film so that its appearance at the end has more dramatic punch; and in the finale there is at least one extremely unflattering view of the costume. Nevertheless, its visage has become one of the most iconic images of horror the genre has ever produced; trying to imagine the film without its presence is nearly impossible—it would be like taking Jack Pierce's werewolf makeup out of **THE WOLF MAN** (1941). To a degree, Chester was right: the audience needs the catharsis of this gigantic smoky thing from Hell descending on Karswell

in the final minutes. Even the demon's early appearance isn't damaging to the film since it serves an important purpose; it convinces us from the outset that the Supernatural exists, while our surrogate, Holden, remains maddeningly skeptical. This schism between our beliefs and Holden's adds a fun layer of tension that Bennett and Tourneur might not have planned on, but actually improves the film.

Clifton Parker's crackling score, largely built from a single, powerful motif—is an underrated asset to the film. When a half-formed smoky shape pursues Holden, we fear the demonic fury of Parker's pounding and trilling orchestra as much as Tourneur's images. This is just one of a handful of classic British horror scores that urgently deserves a complete re-recording (along with Georges Auric's **DEAD OF NIGHT**, Benjamin Frankel's **CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF**, William Alwyn's **NIGHT OF THE EAGLE** and Humphrey Searle's **THE HAUNTING**).

Great as it is, the film has some flaws. It's unfortunate that Tourneur agreed to cast a heavily made-up, overacting Caucasian (Peter Elliot) in the part of the Indian professor, Kumar (surprising, considering the intelligent treatment of blacks in **I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE**—perhaps that was all due to Lewton). The séance sequence, despite its anticipation of Lynchian weirdness (the women sing "Cherry Ripe" while the medium orgasmically shakes and sputters) feels rushed, and its heavy-handed humor stops the film dead at a time when tensions have been so carefully built up. Also, the high-pitched sound that accompanies the demon is too much like the sound of rusty wheels and capable of killing any suspension of disbelief.

Columbia TriStar's claim that **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** is "restored and released for the first time in the US at its full original length" is bound to raise a few eyebrows since all previous domestic video editions have essentially been the longer British version with the American moniker. However, this isn't just the ranting of an uninformed marketing department; since 1986, Columbia has been releasing a hybrid edition: **NIGHT** wedged to **CURSE OF THE DEMON**'s main title. For this latest release, Columbia has finally restored the original title sequence to **NIGHT** (18s longer than **CURSE**'s) and offers the truncated **CURSE OF THE DEMON** as a bonus. Some may gripe that it wasn't necessary to make this DVD a double bill (who wants to watch a cut classic?), but when you think of the likely alternative—yet another release of the hybrid—there's hardly any reason to complain.

Unavailable for 16 years, **CURSE OF THE DEMON** is actually less familiar to today's video collectors and worthy of a spin if you're at all curious to



Holden (Dana Andrews) hypnotizes Rand Hobart (Brian Wilde) to uncover the unspeakable secret of the runes.

see how Hal E. Chester altered the film for the American drive-in crowd. Of the cuts Chester made, usually only the Hobart farm sequence is cited in essays, even though the 3m episode hardly accounts for the overall 13m shorn from the film. A thorough check reveals a startling number of alterations that affect the film in various ways. Following is a complete account of the cuts:

- The pre-credits sequence (shots of Stonehenge accompanied by a “Voice of God” narrator) is missing the following 18s passage: “Through the ages, men have feared and worshipped these creatures. The practice of witchcraft, the cults of evil, have endured and exist to this day.” There doesn’t seem to be any rationality behind this cut until one later realizes that Chester eliminates other references to the existence of a widespread devil-worshipping cult. Through Chester’s cuts, Karswell seems alone in his diabolism, aside from Rand Hobart (Brian Wilde) and the “Brother” Hobart supposedly murdered.
- Credits are different between the two versions. “Sabre Film Productions” is credited, along with “Columbia Pictures Corporation” in **NIGHT**, whereas only “Columbia Pictures Corporation” appears in the credits of **CURSE**. Dana Andrews and Peggy Cummins share a title card in **NIGHT**, but are separated in **CURSE** in order to give more prominence

to Andrews for the American market. Producer Frank Bevis shares a title card with Executive Producer Hal E. Chester in the **NIGHT** credits; but Chester, for reasons of contract or ego, takes full credit for producing **CURSE**.

- 10s of trees illuminated by Professor Harrington’s car headlamps are snipped. The pace of the scene is quickened, but mood is sacrificed.
- Gone is a 5s shot of Karswell and his mother (Athene Sayler) enjoying a game of cards while Harrington knocks on the door. Though slight, this is just the first of many cuts that drastically reduces the role of Karswell’s mother.
- The conversation between Holden and the reporters at the airport is 41s shorter, tempering Holden’s agenda against the Supernatural. Particularly missed is a reporter’s request that Holden “take it kind of easy” on their ghosts. (“We English are sort of fond of them.”) Holden’s reply—“Sure, some of my best friends are ghosts!”—shows that he is capable of levity (I don’t take the remark as being merely “flippant” as Chris Fujiwara claims in his book JACQUES TOURNEUR: THE CINEMA OF NIGHTFALL). Since Andrews often comes across as stuffy and arrogant, we need moments such as these if we are to care about him.
- Holden’s first meeting with his British colleagues is shorn by almost half. The scene ends after Kumar



Joanna (Peggy Cummins) tries to discourage Holden's investigation into a world of power he does not understand.

is asked his opinion of demons ("Oh, I believe in them—absolutely"). An added musical stinger takes us straight to the British Museum. The cut totals 2m 12s, and is one of the most damaging, as it contains Holden's first encounter (by telephone) with Karswell. In the full version, Holden refuses to call off the investigation and Karswell counters with the prophetic line, "That's unfortunate... maybe for both of us." Also within these vital two minutes, the men discuss the release of Hobart for "clinical examination under test conditions," setting the stage for an important event later in the film. Another moment of levity for Holden is lost when Karswell rings and the psychologist quips, "Speak of the devil!"

● During Karswell's meeting with Holden at the British Museum, the following 1m 21s exchange is dropped:

H: "How did you know I was here?"

K: "Isn't it the scientist who always calls what he can't explain otherwise by the word coincidence? Let's call this coincidence."

H: "I wouldn't like to think I'd been followed from my hotel."

K: "Oh, I assure you you weren't followed; I just thought it would be profitable for us to meet, you see."

By losing this exchange, much of the tension between the two men is also lost.

● When Joanna Harrington pays a visit to Holden at his hotel room, she says, "I heard you're continuing with my uncle's investigation... I think you ought to drop it." After an inquisitive, "Oh?" the rest of Holden's response (6s) is cut: "You're the second person to suggest that in one day." This line had to be deleted because it refers back to Holden's excised telephone conversation with Karswell.

● Later, Joanna reads from her uncle's diary, 8s of which is removed, including Holden asking his guest if she would like a cigarette and her curt reply, "No, thanks—there's a lot more about seeing visions of a mysterious smoky shape and feeling cold like you said you were." The excised line is important, as it anticipates Holden's later encounter with a mysterious smoky shape on Karswell's estate.

● The final cut in the hotel room conversation between Joanna and Holden is the longest (14s) and most unfortunate:

H: "It's a pure case of auto suggestion."

J: "But the way he knew he was going to die, and the horrible way he actually did."

H: "There's not a thing that happened that couldn't have been an accident. You see, Miss Harrington, the shock of finding your uncle dead...."

After this, Joanna bolts up from her chair and asserts, "Please don't treat me like a mental patient

who has to be humored!" Missing the three lines that came before, her anger toward Holden isn't allowed enough time to develop sufficiently. Also, these are key lines that reinforce Holden's adherence to logical reasoning. Since much of the story's tension and energy is derived from Holden's refusal to believe in the Supernatural, the removal of any lines that further this notion only lessen the film's impact.

- As Holden and Joanna approach Karswell's manor, two shots are cut of their motor car's passage through a gate. Sure, the pace is quickened by excising these shots, but gone is the reminder of the last time we saw this place—on the night of Professor Harrington's death. Not only do the gate shots give us a sense of geographic familiarity, they reinforce Tourneur's juxtaposing of a world seen from two perspectives. Professor Harrington, convinced of the supernatural and in dread of it, passes through the gate on a windy, shadow-haunted night; when Holden passes through the gate, he's still firmly a skeptic, so the scene is set during the day when the surroundings are tangible and serene. (Later, Holden will pass through this gate again at a time in the story when he's starting to doubt his logic; and so, appropriately, the setting is once again night.)

- Karswell's magic act for the village children is reduced. Gone is the 15s moment where he delights the children by pulling puppies out of a hat, including the line: "See? A magic puppy! Now who'd like to stroke a magic puppy?" By eliminating this moment, Karswell becomes less of a human character.

- As Karswell greets Holden and Joanna, trims tighten the pauses between everyone's lines. Mrs. Karswell's startled "Oh" is cut after her son calls to her, as well as her line to Joanna: "I hope you don't mind children's parties, my dear. Julian is so fond of children. He really ought to be married, but he's so fussy. Oh, you aren't married, are you?" Also gone are Joanna's embarrassed "No," and Karswell's anxious "Oh Mother! Mother!" This 12s cut further reduces the part of Karswell's mother, while continuing to dehumanize Karswell.

- Karswell's windstorm is reduced by 9s; several shots leading up to the lightning bolt hitting the tree are excised.

- As the weather rages outside, Holden has a tense conversation with Karswell that ends with the magician storming out of the room ("The choice is yours!"). The following scene of Mrs. Karswell showing Joanna the book ("As you see, the words make no sense at all") and Karswell's interruption of them is cut. Running 2m 23s, this is Chester's second most lengthy deletion. After Joanna leaves the room, Karswell has a telling conversation with his mother

("I do what I do out of fear") wherein Mrs. Karswell implores with her son to give up the black arts. "Give it back," she says. "How do you give back life?" Karswell responds. "I can't stop it, I can't give it back. I can't let anyone destroy this thing; I must protect myself. Because if it isn't someone else's life, it'll be mine..." Taking away Karswell's motivation and the humanizing idea that he's truly afraid of the dark forces he's unleashed, this is perhaps the most devastating deletion of all. Karswell also mentions his followers during this dialogue, so it's no surprise that Chester cuts it.

- Joanna drops Holden off at his hotel, but not before the suave psychologist makes a date for dinner. The cut accounts for 1m 21s.

- Needing release papers signed in order to carry out the experiment on Hobart, Holden pays a visit to the Hobart farm. When the psychologist opens his billfold, the Satanists see the parchment and exclaim, "He has been chosen!" The removal of this sequence (3m 22s) hurts the development of the Hobart subplot and reduces Holden's (and our) feelings of impending doom. This scene marks the second time Holden's vision blurs (the first was at the museum) and the second time the parchment seems to take on a life of its own. Holden's later expression of doubt ("After this afternoon I must confess there are a few things I don't know") makes little sense without the Hobart farm sequence preceding it. Also, this is the only scene in the film that actually shows us some of Karswell's followers other than Rand Hobart.

- During the weird/humorous séance sequence, Chester cuts out Mr. Meek (Reginald Beckwith) speaking in the voice of a little girl (21s). The loss isn't especially damaging since the ADR is unconvincing anyway. With all of Mrs. Karswell's previous sympathetic moments deleted, her suddenly coming to Holden's aid at this point feels entirely unmotivated. And since the séance is a deviation from the main plot, it's surprising that Chester didn't just delete this scene entirely.

- As Holden leaves his hotel to help with the hypnosis demonstration, he refuses a call from Mrs. Karswell. Chester cuts the following 1m 15s, which involves a telephone conversation between Mrs. Karswell and Joanna. Mrs. Karswell claims that she might have another way to help Mr. Holden: "Someone else knows the secret of the parchment... Tell him Rand Hobart knows... All this evil must end, Miss Harrington, it must end." Karswell appears on the stairs as his mother hangs up. "Please try to understand," she beseeches. Coldly, Karswell replies, "I'm afraid it's you who don't understand." Mrs. Karswell is left alone, weeping. With this scene gone,

Chester's strategy to eliminate Karswell's mother as a key character (and any sense of tragedy) is completed.

- A 7s shot of an ambulance rounding a corner is gone. This is the one cut that Tourneur probably would have agreed to, since he once complained about the "miles and miles of ambulance" that was added after he left the production.
- As Hobart speaks under hypnotic trance, the following line is removed: "... who blaspheme and desecrate... in the joy of sin, where mankind will at last find itself again." This is Chester's final cut to temper the notion that there are others worshipping the Devil besides Karswell.
- Finally, a whopping 2s is cut from Holden's search of the train compartments, which begs the question: why bother?

In addition to the cuts, scenes are inexplicably reordered. There is a sequence of events that starts with Holden sensing something in the shadows outside his hotel room and continues with the doctor whistling a tune to his colleagues—a tune that has been running through his mind—which is recognized as music associated with the Devil. The sequence ends after O'Brien (Liam Redmond) notes that all of Holden's calendar entries have been torn out after the 28th. This sequence falls around the mid-point of **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** (38:31), after Holden's daytime visit to Karswell's estate and experience with the wind-storm. In **CURSE**, the sequence appears much earlier (17:18), right after Holden's initial meeting with Karswell at the British Museum. We can only guess why Chester would want to do something so bizarre—perhaps he wanted to keep the kiddie matinee crowd happy by evenly spacing out the scary scenes; or it might have something to do with that devilish tune. Since it's first introduced into the diegesis over the shot of Karswell departing from the British Museum, Chester might have felt that simpler American minds would make the connection easier if the two sequences were butted up against one another. Another shuffled scene is the lab test of Karswell's calling card: in **NIGHT**, it appears immediately following the British Museum sequence (21:05); in **CURSE**, it comes after the reordered scene of O'Brien showing Holden his torn calendar (21:20).

The shortening of scenes sometimes leads to awkward fade-outs and dissolves, but otherwise, the editing is surprisingly seamless. Chester does more than simply chop; he makes use of alternate takes—over-the-shoulder shots and close-ups that Tourneur opted not to use—to cover the

cuts in dialogue. For instance, Joanna's visit to Holden at his hotel uses so many alternate takes that it feels like a completely new scene! A lot of thought obviously went into the cutting of the American version, but at what price? Karswell becomes a one-dimensional villain instead of the complex, tragic character of the British cut, and his mother barely registers as a blip on the screen.

Aside from the restored opening narration, **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** offers no extra footage. There have been reports of a shot missing from Columbia's previous hybrid edition—of Karswell and his mother returning to their game of cards after Professor Harrington leaves their house—but it's not here. It was assumed by Chris Fujiwara that Columbia used the entire first reel of **CURSE** for the hybrid (see page 298 of Fujiwara's *JACQUES TOURNEUR: THE CINEMA OF NIGHTFALL*), but a check of this DVD's print of **CURSE** proves this was not the case.

Both cuts of the film are presented in widescreen for the first time on home video, 16:9 enhanced and letterboxed to a ratio of 1.63:1. Whereas Columbia has a reputation for overmatting older films for the sake of widescreen television owners (ie., the Harryhausen library), in this case they seem to have gotten it right—or right enough. Compared to the fullframe tape from 1986, this new anamorphic transfer forfeits only a slight amount of information from the bottom while adding considerably more to both sides. At all times, the image appears to be perfectly balanced. **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** is astonishingly crisp and clear with deep, solid blacks and fine shadow detail. The clarity of the transfer reveals minute details in the sets never before gleaned, such as the books and bric-a-brac that decorate Karswell's house. As Karswell stands in front of a window in his study while the windstorm rages, the image is so shockingly clear that every tiny leaf behind him can be discerned. Picture quality between the two prints is nearly identical, however **CURSE** is slightly brighter and offers better shadow detail in certain night scenes, including the demon's attack on Professor Harrington. **CURSE OF THE DEMON** is similarly attractive, but more worn than its companion version. The original full-blooded mono soundtrack has been reprocessed into a 2-channel Dolby mix for both presentations, which doesn't improve the sound all that dramatically and causes some minor break-up in the louder passages. Disappointingly, the only extras Columbia offers are cross-promotional trailers for **FRIGHT NIGHT** and **THE BRIDE**. —BC

Of the major directors who apprenticed under Val Lewton at RKO in the 1940s, Jacques Tourneur was unquestionably the most imaginative, which may paradoxically explain why he had the least mainstream career. While Mark Robson and Robert Wise were making high-profile major studio Academy Award-bid releases like **PEYTON PLACE** and **WEST SIDE STORY**, Tourneur was working on low-budget British thrillers with fading American stars (cf: the underrated **CIRCLE OF DANGER**). **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** has come to be an accepted classic of the horror film, but in 1957 was abbreviated by 14m and retitled **CURSE OF THE DEMON** for US release as a support feature to Hammer's **THE REVENGE OF FRANKENSTEIN**. This valuable release is also a double bill, partnering the US and UK cuts of the film, so it can be watched as both (or either) the substantial, classy, ambitious picture it has always been in Britain or the straight-ahead, cut-to-the-chase horror movie hitherto most often seen in America.

The titles boast that the screenplay by Charles Bennett (and producer Hal E. Chester, reputedly muscling the credit), is based on the story "Casting the Runes" by "Montague R. James." M.R. James is an interesting match with a filmmaker schooled in

the Lewton tradition of horror: like Lewton, James has a reputation as a master of subtle, suggested chills which, on closer examination of the work, turns out to be backed up by a commitment to the physically gruesome and horrible far in excess of the supposedly more lurid competition. The premise of the story is that nasty black magician Karswell disposes of his enemies by slipping them a strip of parchment inscribed with mystic runes that attract a fire-demon raised from Hell (the runes may have inspired such monster-attracting devices as the after-shave of **THE DEVIL BAT** and the feather of **THE FLYING SERPENT**). Karswell's first victim is torn to pieces by the demon, but the hero (like those of the Bela Lugosi and George Zucco films cited) surreptitiously returns the gimmick to the villain, who then suffers the fate intended for his adversary. It's a deservedly oft-reprinted tale, several times adapted for television, with a memorable minor bit of business as Karswell holds a "magic lantern" show for the village children whom he sadistically terrifies by conjuring horrors. (James, incidentally, wrote his stories for reading aloud to young audiences.) However, James' Karswell is the sort of melodramatic baddie Lugosi or Zucco usually played; the major strength of Tourneur and Bennett's approach is the

Hobart's first meeting with Karswell (Niall McGinnis) finds his adversary entertaining at a children's birthday party.



greying up of its antagonist, Julian Karswell, played with double-edged, slightly fey charm by Niall MacGinnis (a brawny outdoorsman for Michael Powell in **THE EDGE OF THE WORLD**).

The opening, which draws visually on elements of the climax of Fritz Lang's **THE TESTAMENT OF DR MABUSE**, has the unaccountably terrified Professor Harrington (the recently-deceased Maurice Denham) pleading with Karswell to remove a curse placed on him in retaliation for Harrington's expose of Karswell's "Devil cult." Karswell, a former music hall clown magician ("Dr. Bobo") who lives with his dotty mother (Athene Seyler) in a lavish house paid for by his followers, seems to accept Harrington's pleas but learns that the runes have burned. Harrington is so relieved that he doesn't understand the implications of Karswell's promise to do "all that can be done" to save him, ie.: nothing. Returning home, Harrington sees a swirling giant apparition that terrifies him into driving into a power-line; we see him being violently raked by its claws, but his death is put down officially to electrocution. An opening like this, criticized by those who would prefer either ambiguity or the withholding of the monster for the climax, was unusual in 1957. Then, films tended not only to build up the horror but to avoid coming in on what seems to be the climax of another story; now, this "teaser" approach has become standard. The rest of the film is a more elaborate replay of the backstory, with American skeptic Holden (Dana Andrews) in the position of Harrington, having a more extensive duel of wits with Karswell ("You think I'm mad... unfortunately, you won't be able to

explain away your death on the 28th of this month so easily"). Also caught up in the plot, repeatedly trying to persuade Holden of the seriousness of his position, is Harrington's niece Joanna (Peggy Cummins, the memorable psycho anti-heroine of **GUN CRAZY** in a rare "nice girl" role).

A 1960s **MAD** magazine article pointed out at length that movie heroes and villains often act against type: villains being courteous, charming, open-minded, attractive, humorous and tolerant, while heroes are rude, bad-tempered, unbending, grim, bigoted and thuggish. This film illustrates the theory in depth. Andrews' Holden, who "meets cute" with Joanna by being selfish and rude on a transatlantic flight, is a such a committed skeptic that he treats anyone who displays the tiniest credulity with arrogant contempt, refusing to accept that he's in danger until ridiculously late in the game, and brushing off two successive Lewton-style demon encounters (with a transformed housecat in Karswell's study and a fireball which pursues him through the woods) with rationalizations that seem more far-fetched than the supernatural explanation everyone else in the film (and the audience) has accepted since Reel One. By contrast, Karswell may be a dastard and a diabolist, but always treats enemies with exaggerated courtesy, even giving fair warning of everything they risk ("If you're thinking of going through the woods, you might find it unpleasant") and his putting-on-a-show for the children is a sincere, almost sad effort ("Oooh, how terrifying," he deadpans when brats in costume jump out at him for a classic "bus" scare) rather than a mean trick.

His life is runed: Karswell falls victim to his own magic in the film's climax.





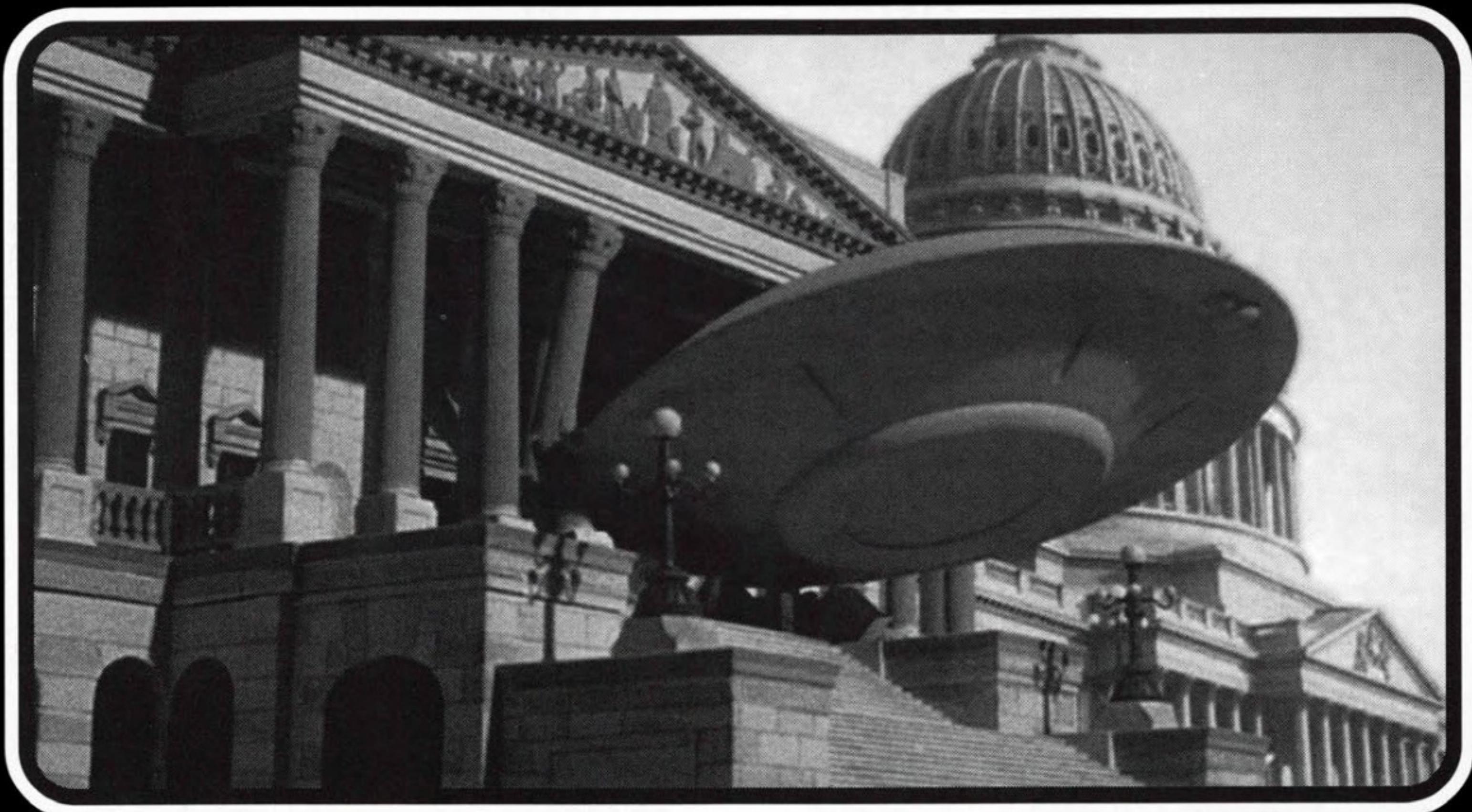
Bennett was a British Hitchcock collaborator, and there is something of Hitch in Karswell's affectionate, ambiguous relationship with his dotting but tentatively treacherous mother, reminiscent of the family man masterfiends of **THE LADY VANISHES**, **NOTORIOUS** or **NORTH BY NORTHWEST**. The Irish MacGinnis plays the Devil-bearded Karswell with a touch of Celtic whimsy, musing about his preference for sliding down snakes as opposed to climbing ladders in the boardgame (when it is suggested this means he's a good loser, he purrs "I'm not, you know") and more movingly afraid ("John, he's frightened, terrified of you") in the finale than the smugly triumphant hero ("I believe that, in five minutes, something monstrous and horrible will happen and when it does, you're going to be here so that what happens to me will also happen to you"). He has a near-lookalike on the side of good in Professor Mark O'Brien, played in a similar key by Liam Redmond. Julian Karswell, in all senses, is one of the most human villains in horror film history, and the strength of his characterization, to my mind, renders irrelevant the much-chewed-over issue of how much or whether the demon in the film should be seen. As with **CAT PEOPLE** (and, unlike, say, Wise's **THE HAUNTING**), there is no ambiguity as to whether the Supernatural is involved, merely a delaying tactic before the skeptic admits that "a world I never knew existed" is real. The monster design is strong enough to recur on every piece of **DEMON** publicity material (whereas, people pushing **THE**

GIANT CLAW do their best to keep the space turkey off box-covers and posters) and its fiery appearances, while sometimes imperfectly-achieved, are a rare, impressive instance of suitmation gigantism in supernatural cinema.

Columbia's DVD presents **CURSE** and **NIGHT** in anamorphic widescreen, and (oddly) affords each version the same number of chapters (28)—though the cuts tend to be snippets within remaining scenes rather than wholesale chunks, so it would have been a problem using chapter menus to detail the differences. Picture quality is outstanding: the pre-credits narration plays over views of Stonehenge which are a bit scratched in both versions (stock footage?), but after the titles, the transfers are terrific, affording a look at the giant demon hitherto available only in stills (underlining the subtle blurs and fire effects Tourneur used to disguise it) and enriching the dark spaces of this most shadow-haunted film (Cummins' topcoat does prompt a moiré rainbow, however). Also impressive is the Dolby Digital mono soundtrack, which brings out tiny nighttime noises, eerie aural frills (an early manifestation is a melody which Holden's colleagues identify as a folk song about the Devil, found as far afield as Ireland and India), the bombast of a seance and a hypnotic demonstration and MacGinnis' well-judged line readings. Promised are subtitles in English, French and Japanese and "bonus trailers," but as with other Columbia titles in this batch the disc supplied me has Japanese language menus and removable subtitles. —KN



D V D S



Ray Harryhausen spectacle at its finest in EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS.

EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS

1956, Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, DD-1.0/LB/16:9/ST+, \$24.95, 83m 12s, DVD-1

In DANSE MACABRE, Stephen King sums up the paranoid mood of the 1950s, reminiscing about a screening of **EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS** interrupted by the announcement that the Russians had taken the high ground by putting Sputnik in orbit. King doesn't mention that kids in that matinee might have been more qualified than most to understand the news, since the early stages of the film revolve around Project Skyhook,

an American plan to deploy communications satellites around the Earth (the script uses the terms "birds," "satellites" and "moons" to mean the same thing). The film is a blatant attempt to evoke the most sensationalist attributes of **THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL** (to which it is a shoot-in-vaders-first "answer") and **THE WAR OF THE WORLDS** (reusing some stock footage and narrator Paul Frees), but also a rare attempt to pay attention to headlines in depicting such UFO-related phenomena as "foo lights" and big-eyed ancient-looking humanoid ETs. The film is also split between frankly makeshift plotting and performance, with

unfilmed scenes replaced by newspaper headlines ("SKYHOOK WIPED OUT: Two Scientists Rescued"), and Ray Harryhausen effects sequences that stand with the best of the 1950s alien scares. The set-pieces are battles on the Skyhook base in the first reel and in Washington DC in the finale; also impressive are scenes inside the domelike saucer as abducted humans are mind-probed (which enables the invaders to one-up a cop who tries to stump them by asking about baseball trivia), a high-angle shot of humans approaching a serene saucer parked on a beach, and the clever mix of new-made effects shots with disaster stock footage.

(The digital restoration of this disc proves that Harryhausen took care to add grain to his own shots to match the texture of the news snippets.)

Though it has a basic storyline—the aliens attack and issue an ultimatum, our side develops a secret weapon and the aliens are defeated—the film is multi-authored and wayward. The credits allege that the source is Donald E. Kehoe's book *Flying Saucers From Outer Space*, but the story was hashed out by Harryhausen and veteran sf/horror specialist Curt Siodmak before a screenplay was written by George Worthing Yates (**THEM!**, **THE AMAZING COLOSSAL MAN**, **EARTH VS. THE SPIDER**) and Raymond T. Marcus (here, as on **ZOMBIES OF MORA TAU** and **THE MAN WHO TURNED TO STONE**, a front for the blacklisted Bernard Gordon). Picking up the occasional VW exploration of the way Stan Lee drew on memories of 1950s creature features in creating the core characters for Marvel Comics, it is worth noting that Yates seems to be a major source for the Incredible Hulk, whose origin is exactly the same as that of the Colossal Man; the character relationships here between egghead Hugh Marlowe, secretary-love interest Joan Taylor, general-father-in-law Morris Ankrum and military-security-officer Donald Curtis are reproduced in Bruce Banner, Betty Ross, General "Thunderbolt" Ross and Major Glenn Talbot (the comics characters even look like their on-screen equivalents). As interesting, perhaps, is the contribution of a blacklisted communist to a film which depicts America as little more than a police state on a permanent war footing, always eager to strike first against aliens and clapping scientists "under detention" to keep them in line with the war

effort. Like Klaatu, these saucer men get blasted without warning when they land, though these would-be conquerors deserve it; as a general muses "when an armed and threatening power lands uninvited in our capital, we don't greet it with tea and cookies!"

The money shots, of course, come in the Washington climax. The B&W images don't have the surreal or tragic feel of similar scenes in **THE WAR OF THE WORLDS**, but the transgressive power of the destruction of familiar national monuments has wormed into popular culture. The scenes of the toppling Washington Monument, and the saucer crashing through the Capitol dome are excerpted in Orson Welles' **F FOR FAKE** and homaged in different ways in both **INDEPENDENCE DAY** and **MARS ATTACKS!**. Harryhausen animates not only the buzzing, mechanically-malign saucers but the devastation, which means that buildings crumble with unrealistic, but nightmarish effect. An addition to that chilling filmography of sequences in everything from **INVASION U.S.A.** to the **KING KONG** remake that are now inescapably informed by 9/11, it is interesting that what is depicted here is not an attack on the Capitol by aliens but the deployment of the secret weapon against the flying saucers, with the national monuments mainly wrecked through collateral damage as downed spaceships collide with buildings that happen to be in the way. Did Gordon sneak in some subversion here? The ostensible right-wing attitudes of the film are occasionally modulated, as when a scientist is offered credit for an invention but insists it be shared with other researchers "around the world," but if we're supposed to conclude that the secret

weapons developed by "our side" are as big a threat to us as the alien invaders then it's a deeply-buried message. And the coda is among the most complacent, hilarious and smug scenes in any 1950s sf film, as Marlowe and Taylor cuddle on a beach, affirming their (America's? humanity's) ownership of the Earth and concluding that the invaders won't return "not on such a nice day" and "not to such a pretty world."

Columbia's "Ray Harryhausen Signature Collection" DVD is presented in 1.80:1, and afforded 28 chapter-stops. The film has been digitally spruced-up and looks (and sounds) terrific, though it is presented in the widescreen TV version of fullscreen—shaving the top and bottom of the image to create an anamorphic picture that fills a 16:9 television monitor. The framing is mostly effective and eye-pleasing, though you can judge what you're missing by comparing the famous shot of a saucer crashing into a dome surmounted with a statue as it appears in the trailer, where there is clear sky over the statue's head, and in the film, where the statue is almost completely cropped.

The special features are mostly familiar from other releases in this series: the Richard Schickel documentary **THE HARRYHAUSEN CHRONICLES**, the featurette **THIS IS DYNAMATION**, and trailers for this film, **THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON** and **THE THREE WORLDS OF GULLIVER**. Unique to this disc are a gallery of stills and a 7m 30s "Making of **EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS**" chat between the ever-genial Harryhausen and VW's own Joe Dante that touches on several interesting background facts, like the use of a sewage plant to sub for

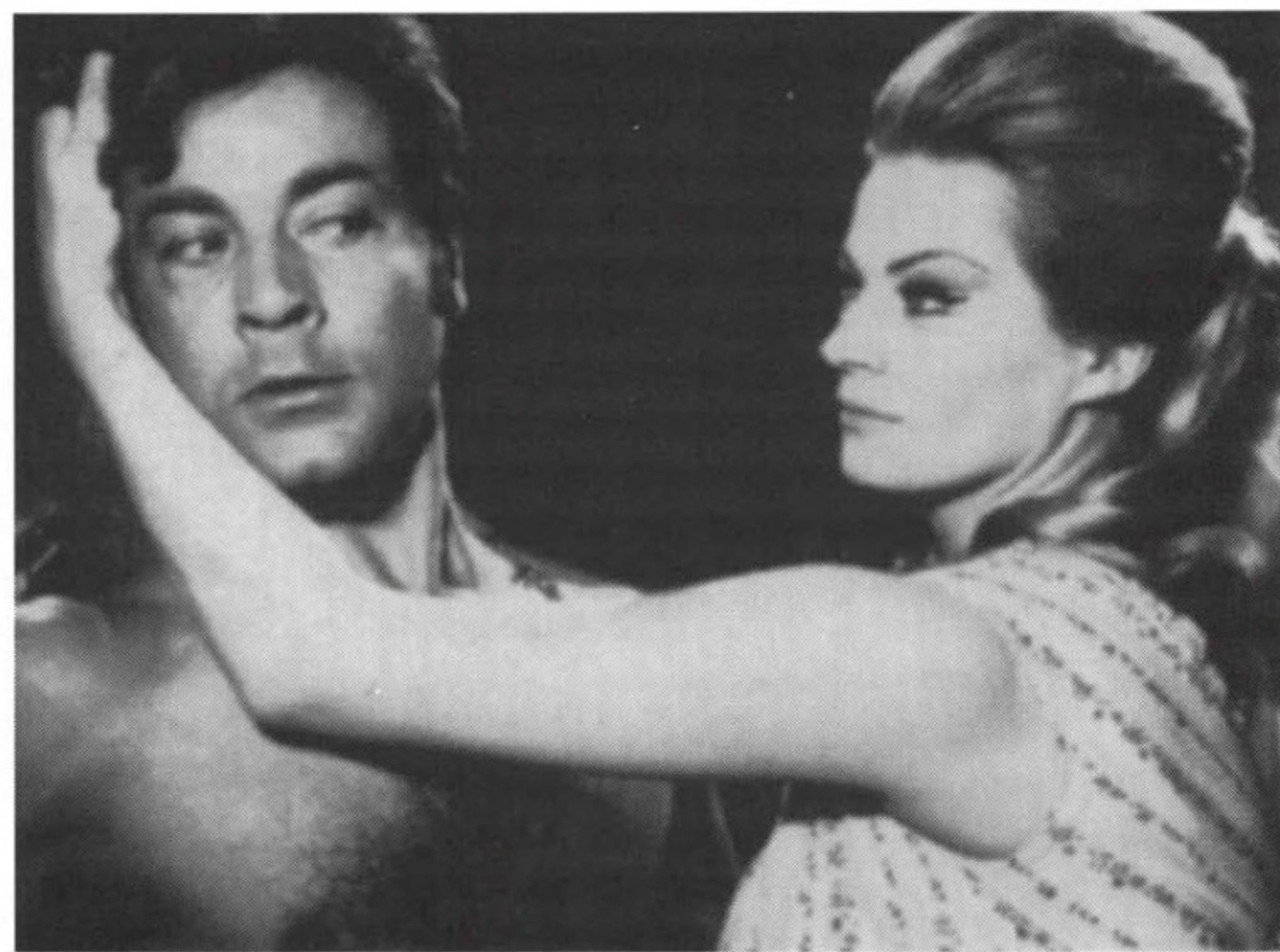
the rocketry base (which led to the sound of gurgling sewage being mixed into the saucer effect) and the extent to which Harryhausen shaped the art direction and lighting of the film.

—Kim Newman

FANGS OF THE LIVING DEAD

Malenka, La Nipote del Vampiro
“*Malenka, the Niece of the Vampire*”
aka **MALENKA, THE VAMPIRE**
1969, Retromedia Entertainment,
DD-2.0, \$14.95, 74m 22s, DVD-0

Put the blame on Don Sharp's **KISS OF THE VAMPIRE** (1962), which begot a veritable subgenre of films about the high life of the Undead. Mind you, they weren't all of the caliber of **DANCE OF THE VAMPIRES** (aka **THE FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS**), Roman Polanski's atmospheric 1967 send-up. Iber Cavalcanti's **Um Sonho de Vampiros** (1969), Andy Milligan's **THE BODY NEATH** (1971) and Jean Rollin's **Le Vampire Nue** (1969) and **Le Frisson de Vampires** (1970) all seemed to suck inspiration from the unearthly pomp of either the Sharp film (made for Hammer Studios) or Polanski's lampoon, while Freddie Francis' dire **THE VAMPIRE HAPPENING** (1970) went so far as to hire Polanski's lead bloodsucker, Ferdinand “Ferdy” Mayne, to force the association. Lost in the shuffle was Spanish director Amando de Ossorio's **Malenka, La Nipote del Vampiro** (1969), an Italo-Spanish co-production not released in the States until in 1973, and then only at the bottom of the PG-rated “Orgy of the Living Dead” triple-bill, alongside shortened, retitled prints of Elio Scardamaglia's **THE MURDER CLINIC** (as **REVENGE OF THE LIVING DEAD**) and Mario Bava's **KILL, BABY... KILL!** (as **CURSE OF THE LIVING DEAD**).



After inheriting a mansion populated by vampires, Anita Ekberg succumbs to stronger influences than fiancé Gianni Medici in **FANGS OF THE LIVING DEAD**.

Before he became known as a specialist in the field (with 1971's **TOMBS OF THE BLIND DEAD** and its three sequels), Amando de Ossorio had tried to dissuade fledgling fantasist Jacinto Molina (aka Paul Naschy) from making horror films in conservative Spain. While Naschy forged ahead with **La Marca del Hombre Lobo** [US: **FRANKENSTEIN'S BLOODY TERROR**, 1968] and TV director Narciso Ibáñez Serrador made his cinematic début with the girl school shocker **La Residencia** [US: **THE HOUSE THAT SCREAMED**, 1969], Ossorio did a fortuitous about-face, but approached the nascent Spanish horror boom in a distinctly lighter vein. An inverse-Cinderella riff with a jet set backbeat, **Malenka** stars Swedish bombshell Anita Ekberg as Sylvia Morell, an Italian swimsuit model engaged to affluent Roman physician Piero Luciani (**RED SUN**'s Gianni Medici). Two weeks before the wedding, Sylvia receives a telegram informing her that she has inherited a castle in Transylvania and a title to go with

it. Traveling alone to the Old Country, Sylvia is introduced to her uncle (Julian Ugarte), a cold-blooded aristocrat who regales her with the “curious history” of her look-alike grandmother Malenka, an alchemist burned at the stake for desiring immortality. When his fiancée fails to return home, Piero and his fearful sidekick Max (César Burner) travel to the castle—where they find Sylvia the prisoner of a burgeoning vampire cult believing her to be the reincarnated Malenka.

Fully intact, **Malenka** was probably never much to shout about; shorn of approximately 20m (Phil Hardy's AURUM/OVERLOOK FILM ENCYCLOPEDIA: HORROR cites an original running time of 94m), **FANGS OF THE LIVING DEAD** is uninspired but painless. Near 40 and still riding the wave of her splashy turn in Federico Fellini's **La dolce vita** (1960), the *zaftig* Ekberg is an unlikely choice for a wide-eyed innocent (not to mention swimsuit model) and never seems properly imperiled; at all times, she looks capable of snapping

the epicene Ugarte (the vampire villain of **La Marca del Hombre Lobo**) like a twig. Far more vulnerable and easier on the eyes are Diana Lorys (**HOUSE OF PSYCHOTIC WOMEN**), **KISS ME MONSTER**'s Rosanna Yanni (largely wasted) and Adriana Ambesi (**CRYPT OF HORROR**) as a trio of local beauties, alive and otherwise. Perhaps the missing reels clipped by US distributor Europix would have given actor Paul Muller more of a workout; here, he's reduced to a wordless blink-and-you'll-miss-it cameo (with even less to do than in **VAMPYROS LESBOS**). Location shooting is limited to postcard views of Rome's Piazza Navona and the impressive battlements of the 13th Century Castillo de Butron near Bilbao, but the interiors are those seen in a number of Spanish horror films, from Jess Franco's **THE AWFUL DR. ORLOF** (which also featured Diana Lorys) to Miguel Madrid's **GRAVEYARD OF HORROR**. Carlo Savina provides the velvety main title and a handful of moody incidental cues heavy on the harpsichord.

Retromedia's DVD runs 74m 54s (a timing that includes logos for Europix International and Ben Barry & Associates Television), which puts it about 10s longer than a similar VHS release from Sinister Cinema (a difference likely explained by frames lost to print damage on the part of the latter). While the Retromedia DVD is cropped (with the opening credits letterboxed to approximately 1.75:1), the materials are in markedly better condition than on Sinister's tape (since discontinued), with far fewer instances of damage and debris. The image is considerably less grainy, the Eastmancolor is vivid (especially during the blue-lit scenes set in the castle crypt) and reds

are stable. Flesh tones are still a bit pale, but all in all, the color palette is satisfying and the mono sound is clear and mostly noise-free. The disc has been given only 6 chapters and there are no extras. Artwork for the keepcase packaging and main menu screen appear to have been taken from the pages of David Pirie's handsomely illustrated 1977 coffee table book **THE VAMPIRE CINEMA** (with one image erroneously grabbed from the original one-sheet for Jean Rollin's **LIPS OF BLOOD**)—not that we're complaining. Mirek Lipinski's liner notes (crowded onto the back cover in a minuscule font) explain that Boris Karloff was originally approached to play the undead Count and that **Malenka**'s producer pulled the plug on the production four weeks into a seven week shooting schedule—which explains a lot. Next up for Amando de Ossorio (who died in 2001) was the humorless and unrelentingly horrific **TOMBS OF THE BLIND DEAD**, which featured **Malenka**'s César Burner as its nominal hero.

—Richard Harland Smith

FRANKENTHUMB

2002, *Image Entertainment*,
DD-5.1 & 2.0/MA/+\$, \$9.99,
31m 48s, DVD-1

Critics review movies with their thumbs, so why not use thumbs to make movies? In the tradition of his other "Thumbtation" DTV shorts **THUMBTANIC**, **THUMB WARS** (reviewed elsewhere in this issue), **BAT THUMB**, **THE GOD-THUMB** and **THE BLAIR THUMB**—which lend new meaning to the age of "digital" entertainment... you might even say they're "cute!"—screenwriter/producer Steve Oedekerk (**ACE VENTURA**, Eddie Murphy's **NUTTY PROFES-**

SOR movies, **PATCH ADAMS**) proceeds to "nail" classic Universal horror in this "slaphappy" color offering. Let's give him a "hand"! He pulled it off without a "hitch"! ("Hitch," get it?) If you're still reading—better yet, if these preening inanities have given you a chuckle or even a not-unwelcome groan—**FRANKENTHUMB** is a half-hour's entertainment well worth pointing out.

Simpering scientist Dr. Frankenthumb (S. Scott Bullock, with his eyes and mouth superimposed, like Colorforms pieces, on a costumed thumb) digs up dead fingers with his hunchbacked goon associate Humpy (Jim Jackman). His mad dream? To create... LIFE!!!! After a suitable brain is purloined from the Bad Brain Institute, the good doctor's first attempt at re-animation is turned to toast by a lightning bolt. Once he gets it right, his green-skinned creation (Oedekerk, wearing thumb tack electrodes) is christened Pepper ("because he's really spiced-up our lives!"). All the highlights of James Whale's 1931 original are lampooned here, with equal parts affection and skill: Edward van Sloan's opening curtain speech (in B&W, complete with fake scratches and wear), the "abnormal brain" theft, the "creation" scene, the monster's encounter with "the little flower that couldn't float," the villagers forming a mob, and the incendiary windmill finale. It would only detract from the peculiar pleasures of this short to reiterate its full storyline, but we'll go ahead and mention that the Burgomeister is played by a thumb but looks remarkably like Jay Leno, and that the climax amusingly recruits Bat Thumb (and his Bat Thumbmobile) into the action.

FRANKENTHUMB is the perfect introduction to Oedekerk's whacky "Thumbtation" universe, and also a very generous little disc. In addition to the main featurette (which can be audited in a choice of DD-5.1 or 2.0, both of which lend a sense of spooky grandeur to the goofiness), the supplemental section includes some outtakes (mostly *faux*, of course), cast interviews (arguably the comic highlight of the disc), storyboards (no kidding!), and a crowded audio commentary by Oedekerk and a slew of co-workers (including director David Bourla, who calls in from NYC). The commentary is neither serious or comedic; everyone seems to be in "regimented fun" mode, and they offer some interesting tid-bits—revealing that an impressive corridor set had to be filmed upside-down, that the short was conceived to be filmed in B&W (but cameraman Mike Deprez made everything too pretty to go that route), and that this mere 30+ minutes of

17-chaptered video contains approximately 350 individual effects shots. Also included are trailers from the other six Thumb movies (the one for **THUMBTANIC** is so long, you'll wonder how the short itself could possibly offer more—but it's very funny), all of which have been collected in a box set from Image Entertainment called—what else?—**ALL THUMBS: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION** (\$49.95). In my line of work, I don't often share the stuff I watch with visiting friends or relatives, but **ALL THUMBS** is clever, silly and inoffensive, and perfect for sharing, a little or a lot, with good company. Our holiday guests gave it a hearty "Thumbs Up." That goes for **FRANKENTHUMB**, especially; you'll probably adopt at least one line of its dialogue for your Pet Phrase of the Week. (For Donna and me, it was "I-a sure-a love-a the pasta!") Put on **FRANKEN-THUMB** and no one will be "opposing" your decision; it'll really spice up your lives. —Tim Lucas

Pepper—complete with thumbtack electrodes—comes to life in Steve Oedekerk's digital horror comedy, FRANKENTHUMB.



THE GAMBLER

1974, Paramount Home Entertainment, DD-1.0/MA/16:9/LB/ST/+ \$24.99, 110m 33s, DVD-1

FINGERS

1977, Warner Home Video, DD-1.0/MA/16:9/LB/+ \$19.98, 89m 52s, DVD-1

New York-based writer/director James Toback broke into the movies with the sale of an original screenplay, **THE GAMBLER**, to Paramount Pictures. Under the astute direction of Czech-born Karel Reisz (**NIGHT MUST FALL**, **MORGAN! A SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT**, **ISADORA**), Toback's admittedly autobiographical script became the most compelling of James Caan's post-**GODFATHER** star vehicles, an incisive character study of a masochistic personality addicted to the thrill of losing. ("If all my games were safe," he explains, "there just wouldn't be any juice.") Like his protagonist, Toback was a professor of English at New York's City College (where this movie was partly filmed), a sports buff and author (he co-wrote the autobiography of actor and football great Jim Brown), and also an inveterate gambler, and his script ably communicates the desperate unease of riding on an ever-lengthening, ever-sharpening knife's edge for most of its nearly two hour running time.

When we meet Axel Freed (Caan), he is losing big, finally exiting a smoky poker room into the early morning light with a gambling debt of \$40,000. Devastated by his losses, he needs a spiritual lift and stops at an inner city basketball court, where he challenges a group of black teens to a few rounds of one-on-one; they can't match his \$20 bet with



The casino lights of Vegas halo James Caan, as a man determined to win or die trying, in *THE GAMBLER*.

more than a dime, so he wagers his \$20 against their dime—and loses again. We gain some insight into Axel's nature as he teaches his lit course, the topic being Fyodor Dostoevsky's novella *THE GAMBLER*; in one of Caan's most persuasive dramatic scenes, he explains to his class the protagonist's conviction that moments occur when "two and two make five," equating it to those moments on the basketball court when his star athlete student Spencer (Carl W. Crudup) senses when he can score with a throw beyond his usual range. Saddled with a mediocre teaching salary, Axel probably feels he can somewhat safely exceed his own financial constraints because he comes from a wealthy family; his grandfather (Morris Carnovsky) owns the largest chain of furniture stores in the country, and his mother (Jacqueline Brooks) is a successful NYC doctor. He asks his mother for a loan and the amount of his debt terrifies her, even though he admits to only

half of what he owes. After a sobering encounter with a collector (Burt Young), Axel confesses the full size of his debt to his mother and she assists him, realizing that he might otherwise be killed. Feeling liberated from his burden, Axel uses his mother's \$40,000 not to settle his old account, but to place a smattering of new \$15,000 bets, and celebrates his financial rescue by spending a day in Las Vegas with girlfriend Billie (Lauren Hutton), where he bets and wins high on a wave of almost supernatural determination and clarity—clearly the kind of buzz that keeps him hooked. Returning to New York with more than \$100,000 in winnings, Axel discovers that not even this amount is enough to save him from the trouble he's made for himself.

Released only a few months after Robert Altman's *CALIFORNIA SPLIT* (a more layered and whimsical, but no less engrossing portrait of the gambling mentality), Reisz's film tells Toback's story

in strong, purposeful and uncluttered fashion. Because there is no overt style to his technique, even the subtlest gestures of cameraman Victor J. Kemper (**HUSBANDS, THE FRIENDS OF EDDIE COYLE**), sometimes have an extraordinary impact, such as when a casino ceiling frames Caan's head like a halo as he reaches the holy summit of his Vegas winning streak, so "chosen" as to be unable to lose. ("Give me the three.") What really sells the film, though, is its catalogue of fine performances, especially by Caan (whose half-buttoned shirts reveal a royal flush of chest hair), Brooks (only nine years older than the actor playing her son), Paul Sorvino as Freed's apoplectic lender, and a supporting cast that includes James Woods, Antonio Fargas, Vic Tayback, M. Emmett Walsh, Steven Keats and London Lee. The only weak link is Lauren Hutton, who plays the girlfriend character as a kind of folksy, barefoot cricket conscience who's forever dropping her G's; it's a real enough type, and may well have

been written this way, but in this context, Hutton's performance strikes a gong of a bad note. The oblique and controversial ending, in which Axel takes the ultimate gamble with all he has left, actually drives the nail that keeps one's thoughts coming back to **THE GAMBLER** for days after viewing it; the answer of whether or not Axel wins this bet with himself is left spinning on the roulette wheel of the viewer's own judgment.

Edited by former Peckinpah cutter (and future director) Roger Spottiswoode, **THE GAMBLER** was photographed at a 1.66:1 ratio, which means that Paramount's anamorphically enhanced "Wide-screen Collection" DVD (1.75:1) crops the image slightly more than intended. While the minor cropping is never invasive or distracting, the compositions feel a bit more crowded than they should; this works to the benefit of some scenes in which Freed feels hemmed-in by his narrowing options for survival, but also works mildly against the deliberate

spaciousness surrounding Caan in the Vegas scenes. The image quality looks about its age: pretty good in the brighter scenes, with unassertive realistic color, but whenever the action cuts to a poker room, a warehouse, a bedroom, or some other dark quarters, as it often does, the transfer looks super grainy as the camera fights for light. The mono sound presents the dialogue and occasional music (by Jerry Fielding, based on Gustav Mahler's "Symphony No. 1") clearly and acceptably. A French mono track is also provided, with English subtitles. Although Paramount has priced this disc in the "with extras" range, no other supplements are provided; the packaging mentions "Menus" as a selling point, but that's all they are—not even bios for Reisz (who died of a rare blood disease in November 2002) or Caan are provided. The price is a little steep, but the movie is ultimately worth it and—who knows?—maybe you'll win the lottery.

A few years after selling his **GAMBLER** script, James Toback made his directorial debut with **FINGERS**, starring Harvey Keitel and again based on an original script. Thirty-eight and playing 32, Keitel is Jimmy Angeletti, the son of a faded NYC mob lender (Michael V. Gazzo) and a mentally ill mother (Marian Seldes), who has broken away from his past as "the best collector in the city" in a bid to realize his dream of becoming a concert pianist. Edgy, sociopathic (he plays '50s doo wop on a ghetto blaster in restaurants), prodigiously talented only in solitude, nervous about failing with music and women, suffering from erectile dysfunction and a swollen prostate, and possibly mildly autistic, Jimmy is at more than one crossroads in his life. While preparing a Bach piece to audition for a Carnegie Hall impresario (**THE SOPRANOS'** Dominic Chianese), Jimmy is asked by his father to recoup two substantial sums he's loaned—\$4,000 to a local pizzeria owner

*Harvey Keitel, invading the privacy of mobster moll Tanya Roberts, has a message to deliver in James Toback's **FINGERS**.*



(Lenny Montana), \$22,000 to polished gangster Patsy Riccamonza (*THE SOPRANOS'* Anthony "Tony" Sirico)—both of whom are boasting around town that they have no intention of repaying him, flaunting his diminished ability to collect. Thus pulled back into his past, becoming the son he was rather than the man he wants to be, Jimmy's sexuality arrives at a crossroads of its own with the chance meeting of Carol (a pre-**ZOMBIE** Tisa Farrow), a fellow music lover, whose sexual diffidence requires domination by a strong male to achieve any kind of definition, which is exactly what Jimmy cannot muster; while failing to make any kind of mark on her blank slate, he sends out a sexual vibe that is picked up only by the gay habitués of his father's favorite restaurant and bar. Pushed and ridiculed by Riccamonza's men (Danny Aiello and Ed Marinaro), who succeed in getting him briefly arrested, Jimmy is equally diminished by a meeting with Carol's main stud, Dreems (Jim Brown, in a potent performance)—a black club owner, all man in a pink T-shirt, whose exact status is never defined, though he is seen pocketing an envelope from one of Riccamonza's men. An unexpected act of violence tips the first in a series of dominoes that take Jimmy to the point of discovering his true self.

Character studies were common enough in the '60s and '70s, but they have become much less prevalent as the American cinema has gone "supersized" with ensemble casts and more externalized action to give audiences "more bang for the buck." Younger viewers approaching **FINGERS** from the perspective of today's busier, more demonstrative cinema may find it

elliptical, difficult, even lacking in action and ensemble, but it actually has both in spades; director Toback takes care to balance the effect of violence with its psychological cause, and the excellent cast would fully deserve "ensemble" status had the story been about a community of characters, rather than various egotists, solipsists and unapproachables—not to mention the protagonist, whose compulsive radio listening and inability to connect socially suggests an undiagnosed form of autism. Despite these quirks, **FINGERS** occupies a seminal position in the post-**GODFATHER** evolution of American gangster pictures, particularly in light of recent developments like **GOODFELLAS** and *THE SOPRANOS*, which—like this picture—contrast the "good old days" mythology of mob life with its devolving, niggardly, contemporary realities. Interestingly, the title of Toback's film is never uttered in the movie itself, but it's a clever fusion of Jimmy's unresolved identities as pianist and underworld figure, and as good a guess as any of the name by which he'll be known in later life.

An independent, 19-day production, **FINGERS** looks fine in this 1.78:1 anamorphic DVD presentation. New York's Soho district is presented in gritty, realistic earhttones, the fashions of the day are emblematic (check out all the bell bottoms), and remarkably accurate fleshtones (in a scene where Jimmy dry-humps Carol, you can actually see a blush redder the bare skin of Keitel's back as he reaches his climax). The mono sound quality is a solid representation of the original source, which used live sound recording in some noisy locations, thereby marring the clarity of one dialogue scene or

two, but the music (by The Jamies, Charlie & Inez Foxx, Jan & Dean and others) is always well-defined. We noticed readily that some cursing was mixed "under the breath," as it were, and in his audio commentary, Toback explains by pointing out that **FINGERS** applied for an MPAA "R" rating 17 times before receiving it, and that a good deal of superfluous profanity was muted to help it qualify. We also noticed that the bathroom tryst between Keitel and Tanya Roberts (as Riccamonza's girlfriend) becomes grainy at one point, when the camera moves in, cropping their activities below the waist, until the thrusting is over; though this is not mentioned by Toback, it would seem to represent another post-production gesture to appease the MPAA.

Toback's commentary is very much a writer's discussion. He offers quite a few details about the production and cast—including the fact that the film was written to take place in summer, and was ultimately filmed in winter without making any adjustments to the screenplay; about Keitel's enhancements of his own concepts of the character; about Tisa Farrow's pre-acting history as a cab driver and bartender; about the "orgiastic lifestyle" of Jim Brown (which he witnessed firsthand while sharing a Los Angeles apartment with the athlete); and about the fortuitous background casting of child actor/future model, Tina Fox—but these are doled out, half and half, with his own analysis of the psychological/thematic underpinnings of the story and character, which gradually become the sole topic of discussion. What he says is interesting and well reasoned, but a little of this will go a long way with most laypersons, who

may find it ponderous. Toback rather grandiosely praises a couple of shots as being among the best he's ever seen in a film, and errs badly when he refers to **FINGERS** as Harvey Keitel's first starring vehicle—overlooking Martin Scorsese's **MEAN STREETS** and its predecessor, **WHO'S THAT KNOCKING AT MY DOOR?**.

Also included are a theatrical trailer (which spoils the surprise of the terrific closing shot) and a short, informal, videotaped interview with Keitel and Toback in which all aspiring filmmakers are advised to get a camera, get some like-minded friends, and do it, because "nobody's going to open the door for you." —Tim Lucas

GREMLINS

1984, Warner Home Video,
DD-5.1 & 2.0/16:9/ST/+,
\$19.98, 106m 7s, DVD-1

INNERSPACE

1987, Warner Home Video,
DD-5.1 & 2.0/16:9/ST/+,
\$19.98, 119m 35s, DVD-1

GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH

1990, Warner Home Video,
DD-5.1 & 2.0/16:9/ST/+,
\$19.98, 106m 18s, DVD-1

Few filmmakers turn out pictures as well-suited to the DVD "Special Edition" format as our own Joe Dante. Not only is he a rare director who inevitably has too much material to cram into a commentary track, but his films are all shot through with such a love of genre trivia (and momentia) that they repay close re-watching. More than once in the commentaries on these three quality releases, mention is made of the influence of MAD Magazine, with its Sergio

Aragones marginal gags and tiny little details slipped into the background to reward kids who read their issues until they fell to pieces. Indeed, **GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH**, characterized on the commentary as "the only rubber monster sequel to mention Susan Sontag," is also the only mainstream sequel to function as a MAD movie satire of the film it is following up. This reference led me to take **MAD ABOUT THE MOVIES** down from the shelf and check out "Grimlins," the Stan Hart/Mort Drucker parody of **GREMLINS**, which does indeed make some of the satirical jabs enlarged upon in **GREMLINS 2**, though the film doesn't pick up Hart's explanation of the rule about keeping the *mogwai* away from bright light because "that way, the audience can't see how the goofy little puppet is actually manipulated."

The three films under review generally represent the side of Dante that pitches slightly more towards a mainstream audience—even if only notionally in the case of **GREMLINS 2**, a sequel undertaken on the condition the director have total freedom. Those with a VW sensibility might feel fonder of Dante's more personal, commercially marginal efforts (**HOLLYWOOD BLVD**, **EXPLORERS**, **MATINEE**) or even his outright exploitation films (**PIRANHA**, **THE HOWLING**), but the personality that shapes all these works is present even in big effects pictures undertaken under the aegis of Steven Spielberg for a major studio. Along with the more recent **SMALL SOLDIERS** [reviewed VW 50:66], this trio represents Dante's best efforts at fitting into a *milieu* created by executives who might not understand why a director would think it important to hire

Kenneth Tobey and Dick Miller for supporting roles (and toss in a clip from **INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS** if there was nothing for Kevin McCarthy), make room in a bar or an elevator for Chuck Jones or Jerry Goldsmith, resurrect props from **THE TIME MACHINE** or **BODY SNATCHERS** (if you miss the pod in **INNERSPACE**, it gets a bigger shot in **GREMLINS 2**) or see that Phoebe Cates' "and that's how I found out there was no Santa Claus" speech in **GREMLINS** was the single factor that elevates a fun monster movie into a Christmas classic (let alone cope with her even more appalling, comically ignored **GREMLINS 2** story about being molested by a man dressed as Honest Abe on Lincoln's birthday). It's not that Dante wipes out his own concerns in these films, but he makes sure also to deliver effects, comedy, action, horror and emotion in all the doses required to sell a big summer picture.

GREMLINS remains Dante's biggest hit. It began as a much nastier script by Chris Columbus, himself a far more mainstream filmmaker than Dante these days, in which hero Billy Peltzer was 13 years old (which is why his best friend is 10 year-old Corey Feldman) and comes home after the kitchen scene to be surprised by his mother's head rolling down stairs (a nod to **HOMICIDAL?**) and the cute Gizmo transforms into the malevolent Stripe. Evidently, co-executive producer Spielberg insisted Gizmo not become the villain, and indeed stick around to be the big hero in the finale (a last-minute change effected by cutting Billy's most heroic moment, which actor Zach Galligan still gripes about). Referencing **IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE**, **GREMLINS** is (like



Zach Galligan entertains Gizmo with a 3-D comic book in Joe Dante's *GREMLINS*, now available as a Special Edition DVD.

the Capra masterpiece) simultaneously a celebration of the enduring strengths of the small town, as epitomized by the disc jockey voiced by **DEATH RACE 2000**'s Don Steele who commemorates surviving until morning with "it's been a rough night for Rockin' Ricky, but he's *still on the air*," and an exposé of its equally enduring cruelties and shortcomings, most notably represented by the Mr. Potter-cum-Miss Gulch villainess Mrs. Deagle (Polly Holliday), though I especially like the Sheriff (Scott Brady) who sees Santa Claus being mugged by cackling monsters and reacts by winding up the patrol car windows and driving off. On top of all the content, this has a mix of Spielbergian wonder, with cute puppets and magical lightshows, with Danteian mischief as the gremlins riot through a kitchen, a barroom and a theater showing **SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS** ("and they *love it*").

Upgrading a previous no-frills release (whose adequate transfer

has been enormously improved by a new remastering), Warner Home Video's DVD is "matted widescreen" to approximately 1.78:1, enhanced for 16:9 TVs, afforded 27 chapter stops, presented in DD-5.1 and 2.0, with tracks and subtitles in English, French and Spanish (Howie Mandel talks about redoing Gizmo's babyltalk in other tongues). The wealth of extras includes 10m of deleted footage (some previously seen in telecast versions) that add more to a vestigial plot about Mrs. Deagle's plan to sell the town to a toxic chemical company and reveal what exactly happened to Billy's co-workers at the bank, a time-obsessed manager (Edward Andrews) killed with clocks and a smarmy yuppie (Judge Reinhold) who goes mad and is left in the vault. Also: trailers for the original release and a re-release (a gag scored with some sombre Handel from **BARRY LYNDON**), a 1984 "making-of" featurette, photo/storyboard

gallery and the usual cribbed-from-the-IMDb filmographies.

Commentary track fiends get a double dose of pleasure (as Dante himself notes "you're getting really a lot of stuff for your money") with two separate tracks, firstly with Dante, producer Michael Finnell and special effects artist Chris Walas, then with Dante and cast members Galligan, Cates, Miller and Mandel (who continue into a commentary on the deleted scenes). Interestingly, Dante makes exactly the same claim about bringing back the Warner Bros. shield/Max Steiner fanfare as Nicholas Meyer makes in the commentary for Warner's simultaneously released disc of **TIME AFTER TIME**. The first track is naturally more technical, with stuff about the evolution of Columbus' script and the ins and outs of the effects work (Walas still has a lot of comical resentment against Gizmo, which explains why the *mogwai* has to suffer so much). Dante examines

..... D V D s

the film in such detail that he points out his own sketches of the Wolf Man and a piranha, also noting that Billy's comic collection is exclusively drawn from DC since Warner owns the company, though a prominently-displayed copy of Marvel's CONAN THE BARBARIAN slipped through somehow. The actors' track is fairly anarchic (Mandel seems bemused by the whole concept and enjoys himself by ribbing Miller) but also offers a lot of entertaining background matter.

After **GREMLINS**, Dante made **EXPLORERS**, which underperformed at the box office. He shudders at mentioning it on the next commentary track, though we're not alone in wishing for a special edition of that sorely underrated picture about the vital importance of genre sf and fantasy to the human condition. This put him on his best make-nice-to-the-studio behavior for **INNERSPACE**, a straight-ahead comedy/sci-fi

hybrid. The high concept pitched by screenwriter Jeffrey Boam (**THE DEAD ZONE**) was a Martin & Lewis film "if you shrunk Dean Martin and put him inside Jerry Lewis," which essentially makes the movie either a parody of **FANTASTIC VOYAGE** or a canny reworking (ahem) of **ALL OF ME**. Opening with microscopic views of icecubes clinking in a glass wielded by alcoholic hotshot pilot Tuck Pendleton (Dennis Quaid, parodying his turn in **THE RIGHT STUFF**), the film sets up a lot of contrivances—with flamboyant villains Kevin McCarthy and Fiona Lewis trying to steal a computer chip from a scientist played by **GREMLINS** cinematographer John Hora (in a surprisingly substantial acting turn)—in order to get a shrunken Tuck and his submersible injected into the ass of hypochondriacal supermarket employee Jack Putter (Martin Short). Very mid-'80s in its humor, fashions, hairstyles, scientific concerns and

pacing (lots of chases), the film has one astonishing **2001**-inspired moment as Tuck is briefly inside the body of his girlfriend (Meg Ryan, with shoulderpads) and floats close to the eyes of his hitherto-unsuspected unborn child.

Warner Home Video's DVD is presented in a "matted wide-screen" format enhanced for 16:9 TVs, afforded 34 chapter-stops, presented in DD-5.1 and 2.0, with tracks in English, French and Japanese and subtitles in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese, Bahasa, Thai and Korean. The extras package is a little less lavish, restricted to a trailer and an audio commentary by Dante, Finnell, effects man Dennis Muren (who took home an Oscar), McCarthy and Dante regular Robert Picardo (who pops in late in the session). The talk ranges widely, and reads the film more as a knockabout comedy than science fiction: everyone in the room finds Short funnier here

The late Kenneth Tobey utters one of his most memorable lines to Martin Short in this urinal scene from INNERSPACE.





Roger Corman Reference Alert! No, this is not a qualified dentist hovering over Zach Galligan, but one of *GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH!*

than I do; it strikes me that the scene in which the character is played by Picardo plays the better for the switch of actors. An odd division of approach is that, while the film plays fast and loose with science for gag effects ("Now we're into total fantasy," Dante admits as Tuck rearranges Jack's face from the inside so he can impersonate an arms dealer), it also tries to "correct" **FANTASTIC VOYAGE** with a more "realistic" vision of the inside of the human body (Dante refutes the frequent assertion that medical footage was used—it is apparently all effects work). The track acknowledges that the film had to be partially reshot when actor Luca Bercovici was replaced by the more imposing Vernon Wells in the role of a villain whose use of interchangeable replacement hand implements might derive from Chuck Connors in John Frankenheimer's **99 & 44/100 % DEAD**.

The ostensible conceit of **GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH** is that, this time, the gremlins get

loose not in picturesque small-town Kingston Falls but in a "smart building" in the heart of New York City. The actual conceit of the sequel is that it takes the skeleton of the original as an excuse for a parade of gags in the style of **HELLZAPOPPIN** (referenced by the gremlin drinking and spouting water through bulletholes). Key characters return, and Billy finally gets to do something heroic at the end to save the day, but Charlie Haas' script is more concerned with satirizing everything it touches within the cable TV empire of tycoon Daniel Clamp (played by John Glover as a big kid, making the character more sympathetic than was originally intended). Dante sets the tone by handing over the reins to Chuck Jones for top-and-tail animations featuring Daffy Duck and Bugs Bunny (of the credits crawl, Daffy comments with a Tex Avery-like "Long, isn't it?"), then chuckles through gag-references featuring Christopher Lee as gene-splicing Dr. Catheter, Leonard Maltin as

himself (attacked physically for his unfavorable review of the original) and a **PHANTOM OF THE OPERA** parody that authentically has its unmasked Phantom go out of focus as he leers at the camera. In the mix are Robert Prosky as an Al Lewis-lookalike horror host who yearns to be a serious newsman, Robert Picardo as a snippy security man who falls into the clutches of a female gremlin, and a Tony Randall-voiced "brain gremlin" who spiels fluently in an exaggerated Ivy League accent and leads the mob in a chorus of "New York, New York."

Dante claims he worked very hard during the production to ensure that there would never be a **GREMLINS 3**, which is good news insofar as I'm concerned, since my original negative review of **GREMLINS 2** would presumably earn me a spell in Maltin's hot seat. Coming back to the film after ten years, I still feel it could do with an emotional core; only in the last reel of **THE 'BURBS** and all of **MATINEE** did Dante get

back to material as deep and personal as **EXPLORERS**, but I concede that its scattershot humor has worn well, certainly better than Martin Short hanging off a truck yelling. It may be the most gag-filled comedy of all time, and it's a rare minute that goes by without something painfully funny and wildly irrelevant getting on screen: the Canadian-themed restaurant with the waiters in Mountie uniform, Glover's faint disappointment at having nothing fun to do in a spare minute, the contrast between Rick Baker's elaborate work here with an extract from **OCTAMAN**, Gizmo being tortured during a "velcro sale" by having strips attached to his fur and torn away, or the lurch out of frame as the film breaks down and cinema manager Paul Bartel fetches Hulk Hogan out of the audience to cow the gremlins' reign of anarchy in the projection booth.

Warner Home Video's DVD is "matted widescreen" to approximately 1.78:1, enhanced for 16:9 TVs (which slices some copyright information from the bottom of the Looney Tunes titles at the beginning), afforded 32 chapter-stops, presented in DD-5.1 and 2.0, with tracks and subtitles in English, French and Spanish. The extras include approximately 20m of deleted scenes, including more Bugs and Daffy (ie., previously unreleased Chuck Jones animation!), a colorization gag snipped because **THE BIG PICTURE** got there first, lots more singing and melting gremlins, a Dracula gag with Lee, and much other funny stuff. Also: a mockumentary featurette that has the cast and crew complaining about Gizmo's star tantrums (Baker's crew evidently came to hate him more even than Walas did, coming up with even more

ways to torture him), a "gag" reel which features a stunt monkey terrified by a puppet, the trailer (also on the **GREMLINS** disc), and a hidden feature (highlight the gremlin hand on the extras menu and click) that contains a sequence shot for the videotape release to replace the cinema scene in which the video seems to malfunction and the gremlins wind up gunned down by John Wayne in redubbed (by Chad Everett) footage from **CHISUM**.

The audio commentary comes from Dante, Galligan (evidently a survivor of the last actors' track), Haas and Finnell, all of whom pitch in with good humor, and maintain the hectic, witty tone of the film. —Kim Newman

HARDWARE WARS: COLLECTOR'S EDITION

1978, *Michael Wiese Productions*,
DD-2.0/MA/+ \$14.95+P&H,
12m 58s, DVD-0

STAR WARP'd: SPECIAL EDITION

2001, *Synapse Films*, DD-2.0/+,
\$12.95, 34m 5s, DVD-0

A GALAXY FAR FAR AWAY

2000, *Vanguard*, DD-2.0/+,
\$19.95, 63m 44s, DVD-0

THUMB WARS: THE PHANTOM CUTICLE

1999, *Image Entertainment*,
DD-5.1 & 2.0/+, \$9.99,
27m 55s, DVD-1

It is not surprising that the mythic stature achieved by the **STAR WARS** trilogy—and its unfolding prequels—has prompted considerable cinematic interest in the form of documentaries and parodies. The four films represented here offer varied responses to the phenomenal

success of George Lucas' epic, and suggest the important contribution **STAR WARS** has made to the popular imagination and to cinematic history. One of the films (**HARDWARE WARS**) is a live action spoof featuring kitchen utensils, two (**THUMB WARS** and **STAR WARP'd**) are animated parodies (if one considers "Thumeration" as a form of puppet animation), and **A GALAXY FAR FAR AWAY**, though it is occasionally offers a satirical view of **STAR WARS** fans, serves as a documentary that attempts to chronicle and explain its singular popularity.

Filmed on location in space, Ernie Fosselius' **HARDWARE WARS**—a saga of romance, rebellion, and household appliances—takes pride of place as the first **STAR WARS** parody ever made. Filmed in the latter half of 1977 during the midst of the **STAR WARS** craze, the film was released early in 1978 and became an instant cult sensation. (We first saw it at an SF convention in the spring of 1982, by which time it had become a popular attraction at such events). Silly, often inspired, irreverent, rife with cheap jokes and a superb assortment of antiquated appliances, this low-budget short is delightful fun. **HARDWARE WARS** occasionally it shows its age (in the sense that it reveals an indebtedness to late '70s pop culture, such as The Muppets), but as a parody it remains deadly in its jabs to its source film, and it remains the film upon which many contemporary parodies have modeled themselves, but have never really surpassed.

Narrated by the inimitable Paul Frees, **HARDWARE WARS** takes the form of a *faux* trailer (accompanied by the music of Richard Wagner's "Ride of the



Fluke Starbucker points out flying irons at 11:00 to pilot Ham Salad, as the Wookie Monster looks on, in **HARDWARE WARS**.

Valkyries," this before it was used to more somber effect by Francis Ford Coppola in 1979's **APOCALYPSE NOW**) about an SF adventure film featuring Fluke Starbucker (Scott Mathews) and Augie "Ben" Doggie (Jeff Hale) as they race to rescue Princess Anne Droid (Cindy Furgatch) from the clutches of the evil Darph Nader (writer/director Ernie Fosselius, in the best Darth Vader spoof yet conceived). To do so, they enlist the help of Ham Salad (Bob Knickerbocker) and his sidekick Chewchilla, a "Wookie Monster" (as in "Cookie Monster," a hand puppet) as well as Artie Deco (a canister vacuum cleaner) and 4-Q-2 (Frank Robertson), who looks remarkably like the Tin Man from **THE WIZARD OF OZ**.

Although its caricatures of the principle characters of **STAR WARS** would seem to be the focus, perhaps the most inspired aspect of the film is its substitution of quotidian objects for spaceships and other props: Princess Anne Droid's home planet is a basketball, laser guns

are electric drills, light sabers are flashlights, the Millennium Falcon a steam iron, fighter ships are egg beaters, and the Death Star a waffle iron. In other words, **HARDWARE WARS** is sublime silliness. (The scene in which Augie "Ben" Doggie is dismissed as a martyr accompanied by cat-calls still remains our favorite moment in a film that is merely an assemblage of moments.) Curiously, it appears that some of SF experimental filmmaker Jordan Belson's **CHAKRA** footage is inserted in the sequence when the Millennium Falcon accelerates into hyperspace.

As you would hope, considering its 12m length, **HARDWARE WARS** has come to DVD loaded with supplements, accessible through various switches and buttons on a cleverly designed, Rube Goldberg-like menu, which push the disc's total running time to about 52m. Presented as a "prequel" to the film is **ANTIQUES SIDESHOW** (5m 17s, naturally a parody of the PBS series **ANTIQUES ROADSHOW**), in which a woman has found a canister

containing the **HARDWARE WARS** reel, only to have the antique dealer keep the canister because of its great value and return the reel of film to her, telling her it is worthless. Also included is the amusing 11m 9s pirated "Foreign Version" of the film (obviously a jape) in which the film has been slightly re-edited and the soundtrack dubbed in a sort of pigeon Russian.

The disc also includes a "Director's Commentary," but it is actually a superb parody of such audio commentaries, in which Ernie Fosselius reveals he hasn't lost his sense of humor over the past 25 years. Beginning with a commentary that presumes to remark on the film's profound symbolism and its Felliniesque "filmositude," Fosselius quickly runs short of philosophical/critical ideas and soon launches into the anecdotal, managing to say absolutely nothing about the making of the film itself over the next several minutes. Fosselius appears in a 6m segment from a local "Creature Feature" television show from early January 1978, in which he introduces the film and also manages to satirize product tie-ins (the disc also includes several dozen original drawings by Fosselius advertising faux Hollywood products as well, which have absolutely nothing to do with **HARDWARE WARS**, but are fun nonetheless). There is also a 10m 9s "Director's Cut" consisting of outtakes, and also about two dozen production stills. Finally, co-producer Michael Wiese appears in a 5m segment, talking with student filmmakers about the making of **HARDWARE WARS**, at one point averring that he heard George Lucas on British television say that **HARDWARE WARS** remains his favorite **STAR WARS** parody.

Some of the supplemental materials are transferred from digital sources and look fine; the transfer of **HARDWARE WARS** itself is likewise fine, although the homemade film (shot in 16mm) never looked great. The colors are generally vivid and the picture is sharp if just a tad dark, revealing all the warts inherent in the film's low-budget origins. The soundtrack, however, has been given a resonant remix in 16-bit digital stereo. The **HARDWARE WARS** DVD is available through Michael Wiese Productions at www.mwp.com or by calling 1-800-833-5738.

Even more inventive than **HARDWARE WARS**, hands-down (a pun the filmmakers would endorse), is **THUMB WARS**. Its creator, Steve Oedekerk (screenwriter of **ACE VENTURA: WHEN NATURE CALLS**, creator of **THE ADVENTURES OF JIMMY NEUTRON, BOY GENIUS**), understands that the function of parody is to offer an instructive or critical commentary on its pretext or source, even as it accomplishes this through humor. He also understands that a successful parody depends upon

establishing a clear and easily recognizable correspondence between itself and its subject. **THUMB WARS** succeeds because it alters only one feature of the original—namely the setting or size—offering a wry commentary on the original's epic stature. The humor works because the canvas is reduced from the galactic to the minuscule, as the title suggests. The hero, the whiny Loke Groundrunner, and his companion, Princess Bunhead, attempt to thwart the designs of their foes, Black Helmet Man (who has a black thimble for a helmet) and his constituents of the Evil Thumpire. They are aided by a bald thumb, Oobedoob Benubi (actually Oobedoob Scooby-Doob Benubi) who, in turn, enlists the help of Hand Duet and Crunchaka or "Crunchy." The plot remains both simple and recognizable, and succeeds because it relies on good-humored parody, caricature, and a spirit of fun.

The disc's extras include an amusing (if revolting) 2m 37s "Gabba the Butt" interview, a gallery of storyboard drawings, and trailers for **THUMB WARS** (1m

43s) and two other "Thumbtation" productions, **THUMBTANIC** (3m 47s) and **THE BLAIR THUMB** (49s). There is also an entertaining audio commentary by director Steve Oedekerk and producer Paul Marshal, who engage in verbal repartee even as they comment in satirical fashion on their own film. The full-frame picture is sharp and colorful, with audio options in both DD-2.0 and 5.1, which lend **THUMB WARS** a bombastically heroic soundscape that makes the concept doubly funny.

In contrast to the narrow focus of **THUMB WARS**, **STAR WARP'D** is all over the culture map, spoofing several classic science fiction franchises. Like **THUMB WARS**, its putative goal is parody and it works with animation—in this case, clay animation. The premise is to pit the good guys from **STAR TREK**, Captain Kwirk, Mr. Spuck, and Mr. Squat, along with other SF film good guys such as NT (Non-Terrestrial) and Robofuzz, against the villains of SF films, such as Dark Vapor and his flatulence ("the Dark Smell of the Force"), Mini-Mall (an amalgam of "Mini-Me" from **AUSTIN POWERS** and Darth Maul from **THE PHANTOM MENACE**), and The Schwartz-enator. The struggle is between the good and evil forces for control of a giant black monolith (**2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY**) that can effect the cosmic balance of these forces. The result of this melange of characters and allusions, whose source counterparts are instantly recognizable, is an occasionally amusing and inventive short film that will probably do quite well on the SF convention circuit. The disc's special features include an audio commentary by filmmakers Pete Schuermann, John Schuermann,

*More than just the Skywalker franchise is spoofed in the clay animation short **STAR WARP'D**.*



and David Carty, which actually increased our appreciation of the film; 12m 48s of behind-the-scenes footage chronicling the making of the short, and a 2m 28s trailer. Also included is a roughly 15m "sneak peak" of **STAR WARP'd** planned sequels, EPISODE 2.1: THE GOOD, THE BAND AND THE EWOQUIS, and EPISODE 2.2: VINI, VIDI, VAPOR (I CAME, I SAW, I FARTED. The 1.46:1 image is quite good, and the DD-2.0 mix is serviceable.

A GALAXY FAR FAR AWAY is a documentary that tries to do two things. One is to explore the cultural interest in **STAR WARS**, while the other is to chronicle the excitement surrounding the premiere of **STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM MENACE** in 1999. Its sojourn into the study of fandom features interviews with fans and fanatics, executives, and celebrities, including footage from **STAR WARS** conventions. In short, it tries to do with **STAR WARS** what **TREKKIES** (1997) did with **STAR TREK** fans. **TREKKIES**, however, is the better film, largely because it had a better sense of humor about its subject, as well as more tolerance for the fans' eccentricities. Its documentation of fans camping out for 42 days prior to the long-awaited debut of **THE PHANTOM MENACE**, for instance, did little to capture the vitality of the series itself, or attempt to explain its charismatic appeal. The jacket blurb claims that **A GALAXY FAR FAR AWAY** is more than a film about zealous fans, offering instead "new insight into the reasons these fast-paced science fiction films struck a mysterious and powerful chord with all races, genders and generations," yet the mythic appeal of the trilogy and its sequels largely eludes the filmmakers. These questions regarding the cultural interest in



*A GALAXY FAR FAR AWAY illustrates that, while some **STAR TREK** fans outgrow their devotion, others—like these two—cling on.*

STAR WARS were explored in a more disciplined and intellectual fashion well over a decade ago in a series of conversations between journalist Bill Moyers and myth scholar Joseph Campbell. In other words, cultural critics have already been there, done that. The most interesting comment is made by producer Terry Tocantins, who says that he can quote lines from the **STAR WARS** films, but can't quote the Bible. The displacement of religion by literature (and now film) was observed almost 150 years ago by Matthew Arnold, and reaffirmed by Joseph Campbell in his book **THE POWER OF MYTH**. We suspect that **A GALAXY FAR FAR AWAY** may do well at convention screenings, when the entire experience of fandom can be screened in a sort of self-reflexive fashion, but otherwise, **A GALAXY FAR FAR AWAY** bears no new insights or discoveries.

Shot in a number of major cities nationwide, the film was reduced to its present length from purportedly 150 hours of video tape. No doubt much of this was unusable, as the convention footage was shot on

video by **STAR WARS** fans, not experienced cameramen, and hence some sequences are occasionally poorly lit and out of focus. The DD-2.0 is adequate, but reveals all the limitations of location shooting. Extra materials include a 33s trailer and roughly 15m of material labeled deleted scenes, but we doubt that this is precisely correct because two such scenes, "Santa Barbara Interview" and "Park City Interview," are actually TV interviews with the filmmakers, Tariq Jalil and Terry Tocantins (with poor audio quality in both cases). The disc also includes an audio commentary with director Tariq Jalil, producer Terry Tocantins, co-editor Mikee Schwinn and one of the cameramen who shot some of the footage of the Los Angeles **PHANTOM MENACE** premiere, Jeremy Elwood. The conversation tends to focus on production problems and other technical aspects, rather than on the inspiration for the documentary: a series of SF films that have captivated audiences for the past quarter century.
—Rebecca & Sam Umland

HEART OF GLASS

Herz aus Glas

1976, Anchor Bay Entertainment,
DD-2.0/MA/16:9/LB/ST/+,\$24.95, 94m 9s, DVD-0

LITTLE DIETER NEEDS TO FLY

1998, Anchor Bay Entertainment,
DD-1.0/16:9/LB/+, \$24.95,
77m 38s, DVD-0

Werner Herzog's early feature films went largely unseen in the United States until the Bavaria-born German filmmaker was in the second decade of his career (the exception being New Line's 1971 release of his 1969 film **EVEN DWARFS STARTED SMALL** [reviewed VW 60:12]). Likely encouraged by the warm response from American critics to the works of Herzog's countrymen Volker Schlöndorff, Wim Wenders and the über-prolific Rainer Werner Fassbinder, New Yorker Films distributed three Herzog titles in 1977: the five-year old **AGUIRRE: THE WRATH OF GOD** [reviewed VW 78:42] in April, **STROSZEK** in July and **HEART OF GLASS** in August. Shot after his fact-based **THE ENIGMA OF KASPAR HAUSER** (aka **EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF AND GOD AGAINST ALL**, 1974), **HEART OF GLASS** echoes similar themes of societal alienation in the fictional plight of an early 19th Century Bavarian village whose glassworks foreman dies suddenly, without passing on the secret ingredient for making the celebrated "ruby glass." While the factory owner (Stefan Güttler) searches for clues among the dead glassblower's personal effects, the village herdsman (Josef Bierbichler, the conceited drum major of Herzog's **WOYZECK**) comes down off the mountain having envisioned the imminent end of the world.

Like Kaspar Hauser, Josef Bierbichler's wooly soothsayer is

a charismatic *naïf*, a "fragile soul" who breaches the known world mouthing proclamations that at first beguile and then frighten society into taking action against him. The film received great notoriety (as well as infamy) at the time of its release when Herzog admitted using hypnosis to manipulate his cast of largely nonprofessional performers. (Herzog had also cast a former mental patient, "Bruno S.," as his leading man in both **KASPAR HAUSER** and **STROSZEK**.) Whatever one's belief in the persuasive power of mesmerism or its utilization as a tool in the arts, **HEART OF GLASS** is distinguished by a staggering dreamlike quality that hearkens back to both Bavarian fairy tales and the use of Expressionism in silent films of the Weimar era. (One gauzy visual [31:17] of distant mountain crags recalls Murnau and anticipates Herzog's **NOSFERATU** remake by three years.) Herzog's cast seems

genuinely stupefied by their environment, which matches the mood of enchantment and mounting dread indicated in the screenplay by Herzog and author Herbert Achternbusch. A more serious (but hardly sober-sided) consideration of the collective hysteria that breeds doomsday mongering than Guy Maddin's *Heimat*-esque **CAREFUL** [VW 33:11, 68:69], **HEART OF GLASS** splits Herzog's sympathies between the effete village master (whose affected style of dress looks back to the previous century and isolates him from his contemporaries) and the prophetic cowherd unsure of the currency of his own visions ("I tell you what I see. I do not know if it will happen"). Despite critic Diane Jacobs' observation (in 1980) that **HEART OF GLASS** is "a beautiful nightmare of a movie that may mean almost nothing," the questions it poses about man's dependence on Meaning and Purpose are as profound as they are

Seasoned horror fans might be a few steps ahead of the hypnotized cast of HEART OF GLASS, as they struggle to determine the secret ingredient of their village's famous "ruby glass."



unanswerable. This is vintage, quintessential Herzog—which makes this Anchor Bay Entertainment DVD especially welcome.

HEART OF GLASS was shot by Jörg Schmidt-Reitwein (**WOYZECK, NOSFERATU THE VAMPYRE**), employing a variety of filters and film stocks that endow the evocative imagery with multiple layers of perception and a Vermeer-like radiance to its interior setups. Herzog and his cinematographer allow their film to commence in tendrils of fog and ground mist which are exaggerated by the use of lower film gauges that often increase the amount of grain to newsreel proportions. The film's first clear image comes only after several minutes, and the transition is jarring to say the least. When it is designed to, **HEART OF GLASS** looks crystal clear on this anamorphic widescreen (1.69:1) transfer, with rich (albeit generally subdued) colors and satisfying black levels. As they had for several of his films, prog rockers Popol Vuh provide another quietly intense score (accompanied by the use of Swiss yodeling and Late Medieval polyphony), which is well served by the disc's Dolby Digital-enhanced mono soundtrack. The film is presented in German, with optional English subtitles.

Anchor Bay has provided the disc with 23 chapter stops, and its roster of extras runs to a 3m 36s letterboxed German language trailer, a Herzog biography (written by Jay Marks and Waylon Wahl) and production notes by Mark Wickum. Writer Jim Knipfel also provides liner notes included as a booklet within the keepcase that reproduces the film's German ad art. Werner Herzog is present for a feature-length audio commentary

(hosted by Norman Hill), in which he cops to capturing some of his Bavarian vistas in Southern Switzerland, in Alaska, in Wyoming's Yellowstone National Park and in Utah's Monument Valley. Herzog also identifies himself as an extra and comments on such esoteric topics as the stillness that presages Bavarian aggression, "ecstatic truth," and the myth of mind control through hypnosis ("Whatever is your heart, the hard core of your character, is un-touchable").

Halfway through Herzog's 1998 documentary **LITTLE DIETER NEEDS TO FLY**, Dieter Dengler, a German-born American fighter pilot who was shot down during the early days of the Vietnam conflict and spent six months as a prisoner of war before his eventual escape and rescue, stands in a Laotian hut 30 years later recalling one particularly grisly memory attached to the experience. A villager who had forcibly stolen Dengler's engagement ring was punished by the Vietcong by having his finger hacked off with a machete before the keepsake was returned to its rightful (and horrified) owner. As if sensing the discomfiture of one of the present day Laotian onlookers, Dengler puts his arm around the native's shoulders and comforts him with the assurance, "It's just a movie, don't worry about it." As Dengler laughs, showing teeth, the native returns the smile (likely having no clue what has just been said) while Herzog and cinematographer Peter Zeitlinger hold the shot for a few extra frames. Fans of Herzog's work should recognize this dynamic of the unflappable outsider being humored by his uneasy aboriginal helpmeet: think Aguirre and his Indios, Fitzcarraldo and his "bare-asses,"

or the slave trader "Cobra Verde" and his army of Gold Coast Amazons. It's familiar territory, but because Werner Herzog is our guide, it feels as though we are seeing it all for the first time.

Late in life, Dieter Dengler was a civilian test pilot living in Northern California, an area north of San Francisco that Herzog also called home. Like his biographer, Dengler was a child of poverty; having lost his father to fighting in World War II, Dengler and his brothers were raised by their mother to root through their bombed out Black Forest village for anything that would yield sustenance—even boiling down wallpaper for the nutrients in the glue. The chance sighting of an Allied fighter plane sparked a "burning desire" in the heart of little Dieter to fly; working as a blacksmith's apprentice, Dengler endured hardship and constant beatings that nonetheless gave him the financial independence to travel to America when he was 18 years old. Enlisting in the Air Force and packed off to Texas, Dengler was given unglamorous work in the kitchen and motor pool, so the immigrant bettered himself through night school and college, obtaining American citizenship and traveling to California where he enlisted in the Navy and worked his way up to the rank of second lieutenant. On February 1, 1966, Dengler's Douglas A1H Skyraider prop plane was shot down only two hours after leaving the flight deck of the USS Ranger. Lost in the jungle and later taken prisoner by communist Pathet Lao guerillas and brutalized in a detainment camp, Dengler came to appreciate the rigors of his boyhood apprenticeship, which gave him the will to survive any punishment.



Former POW Dieter Dengler revisits the scenes of his Laotian nightmare in LITTLE DIETER NEEDS TO FLY, Werner Herzog's documentary about the psychology of survival.

As he had with previous documentaries, Herzog (who shares narration duties with Dengler—newcomers may have trouble distinguishing between the two) structures **LITTLE DIETER NEEDS TO FLY** as a series of chapters or dramatic acts, detailing “The man” Dieter Dengler, “His dream” to fly, his eventual “Punishment” at the hands of the Vietcong and his escape (with a fellow American prisoner, who died horribly at his side) and ultimate “Redemption.” Herzog and crew follow their philosophical subject around the world from his comfortable California home (stocked with tons of emergency provisions) to the jungles of Laos, where the locals help Dengler recreate his capture and confinement. Reliving the drama even to the point of being bound with rope (“This feels a little too close to home”) and made to run through the jungle by half a dozen make-believe VCs, Dengler proves a thoughtful and

even visionary survivor, comparing his plight to that of his grandfather, who was pilloried in Germany in the 1930s for his refusal to vote for Hitler. (Herzog once made the remark that modern day Germans have “not fathers to learn from, only grandfathers.”) What sets “Little Dieter” apart from most Herzog heroes is his seeming sense of inner peace (however rooted in profound sorrow) and a willingness to laugh at the limits of dreams. It was only when Dengler abandoned all hope of ever being rescued—at that point where his dream to fly became a dream simply to die—that he was found. “Death didn’t want him,” Herzog concludes, revealing the somber underbelly of even the happiest of endings.

LITTLE DIETER NEEDS TO FLY received a limited theatrical run in the United States and garnered more than its fair share of awards at film festivals around the world.

The latest entry (with **HEART OF GLASS**) in Anchor Bay Entertainment’s “Werner Herzog Collection,” the film looks superb, with vibrant colors (jungle greens and the heavenly blues of an aquarium full of jellyfish that remind Dengler of the Angel of Death). Letterboxed at 1.83:1, the film is presented in English (as it was for its theatrical release), with a soundtrack rich in eclectic music choices (opera, tango and throat singing). Extras are slight: Mark Wickum provides another set of informative and thoughtful production notes, but the Herzog bio is a repeat of the one on the **HEART OF GLASS** disc. Although ABE’s cover reports a 74m running time, the disc clocks in at better than 77m, due to a videotape “postscript” shot in 2001, which brings the story of Dieter Dengler up to date and provides a poignant coda to this incredible story of a man Death didn’t want.
—Richard Harland Smith

THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES

2002, Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, DD-5.1/16:9/LB/ST/CC/+; \$27.96, 118m 40s, DVD-1

Two years after his wife's sudden death, WASHINGTON POST reporter John Klein (Richard Gere) is assigned to cover the expected announcement that the governor of Virginia is running for President. While driving south from Washington to Richmond, Klein experiences late night car trouble. Seeking help, he knocks on the door of a house just off the highway, and finds himself face-to-face with shotgun-wielding Gordon Smallwood (Will Patton), who threatens to shoot Klein for harassing his family for the third consecutive night. Before Smallwood can carry out his threat, however, the baffled Klein is rescued by the local Sheriff, Connie Mills (Laura Linney). If the false accusations aren't enough, Klein soon learns that he is missing time, having been informed by Sheriff Mills that he is in Point Pleasant, West Virginia, several

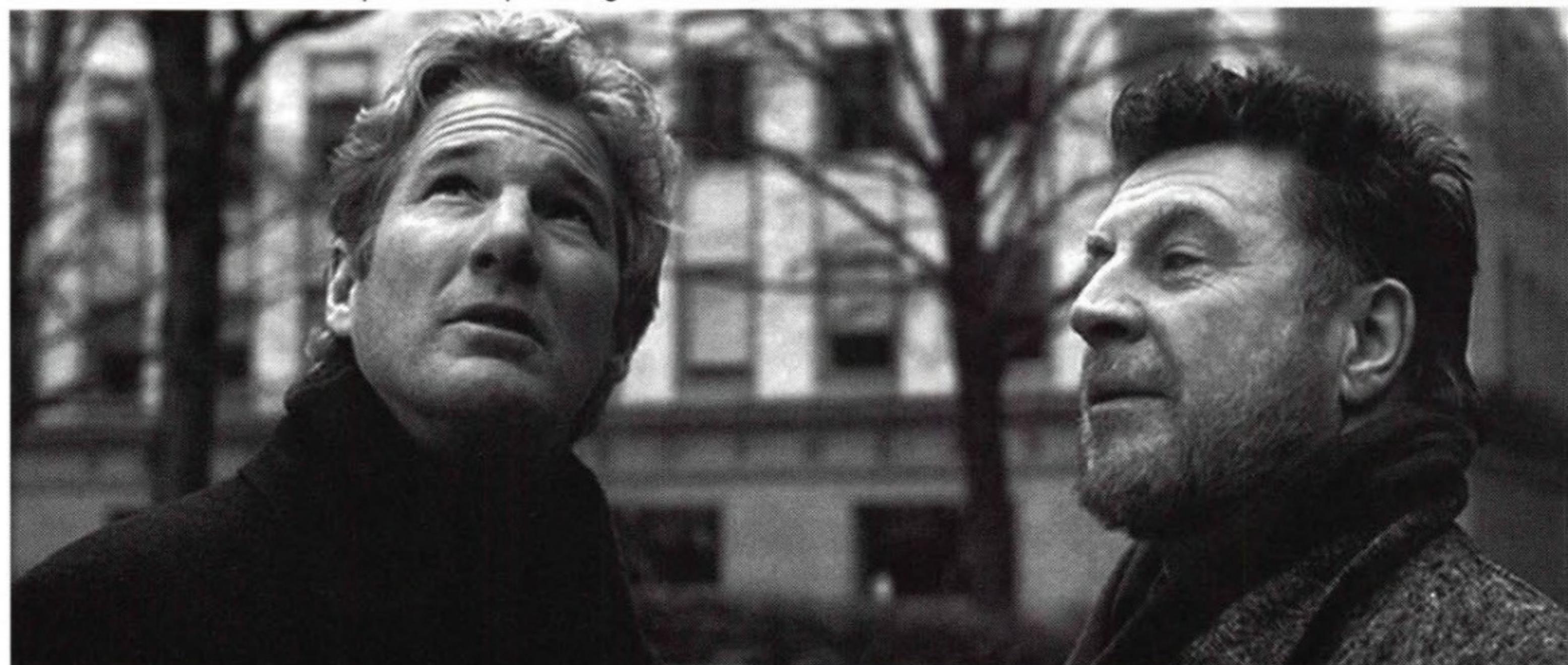
hours west of his intended destination, Richmond. Having no idea how he got there but determined to discover the truth, Klein installs himself at the local motel and seeks the assistance of Sheriff Mills. During his questioning of local citizens, Klein discovers that there have been sightings of a tall, winged man with demonic red eyes—the "Mothman"—sketches of which by the locals resemble the drawings made by his wife prior to her death. The situation becomes even more byzantine when Gordon Smallwood arranges a meeting with Klein to tell him that he has been contacted by a mysterious being named Indrid Cold—who, it is soon revealed, has given Smallwood foreknowledge of a future disaster. As a result of this and other uncanny events, Klein contacts the reclusive paranormal researcher Alexander Leek (Alan Bates) in order to ascertain the nature of the mysterious entities who can predict the future, but secretly hoping that Indrid Cold may be the means through which he can contact his dead wife. But are the Mothman

and Indrid Cold agents of Good or Evil, and what is the reason for their sightings in the area of Point Pleasant?

Directed by Mark Pellington (**ARLINGTON ROAD**) and loosely based on Fortean John A. Keel's 1975 cult book, the film follows its source in one important way, by concluding with the collapse of the Silver Bridge, the bridge that spanned the Ohio River between Point Pleasant, West Virginia and points west in the state of Ohio. This real-life tragedy, that occurred on December 15, 1967, also served as the basis for the 1970 novel **THE SILVER BRIDGE** by Gray Barker, author of 1956's **THEY KNEW TOO MUCH ABOUT FLYING SAUCERS**, the book that created the legend of the "Men In Black." In Keel's book, sightings of the Mothman in the Point Pleasant area, and the accompanying paranormal activity such as the appearance of Indrid Cold, ceased following the Silver Bridge disaster, thus suggesting that the Mothman was an avatar of doom.

Yet lurking somewhere within **THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES**

Richard Gere and Alan Bates discuss whether supernatural beings can predict impending disasters in THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES.



are the New Age metaphysics of films such as **JACOB'S LADDER** (1991), in which angels appear as demons to a human soul unprepared for death, but as angels for one prepared to journey to the undiscovered country. (There is also one memorable *frisson* that arguably derives from an exchange in David Lynch's **LOST HIGHWAY** involving the Mystery Man.) This ambivalence occurs in the film when a character refers to a series of sketches of the Mothman as drawings of angels, but to John Klein (and to us) they look like demons. The core narrative of **THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES** is about an uxorious widower incapable of coming to terms with his wife's premature death, and for whom the figure of the Mothman is both a symbol of the implacable and terrible mystery of Fate and also a key to explaining its mysteries. Is the Mothman an avatar of doom, or a benevolent oracle who gives his contactees knowledge of the future in order to help them avoid certain disaster?

Of course, in orthodox Judeo-Christian theology, angels are fearful creatures: God sends them to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, for instance, and Jacob carries the wound of having wrestled with an angel. Yet angels are also instruments of grace. The filmmakers seem content to explore the dramatic possibilities of this dualism, but it does lend to some confusion, also present in Keel's source text. Are Indrid Cold and the Mothman the same Janus-faced entity? In Keel's book, Indrid Cold is not the Mothman but a garrulous extraterrestrial who announces his presence to a slightly mad contactee named Woody Derenberger. By contrast, in the film,

the character contacted by Indrid Cold is the tortured if still sympathetic Gordon Smallwood, convincingly played by Will Patton. There are suggestions that Indrid Cold is an alien, and indeed the film contains several allusions to the lore of the close encounter: missing time, the sudden loss of vehicular electrical power, eyeburn, concussion (Smallwood's bleeding ear), telepathy, and so on. In addition, there are also inexplicable moments that happen to Klein that in his book Keel argues occur to every UFO researcher: ringing phones with no one on the other end of the line, for instance, calls consisting of nothing but jibberish, and people following up on phone calls attributed to the researcher that he has no memory of making. All this ratchets up the paranoia dial, but to what does it all add up? Angels or aliens? Objectively real events or unconscious fears and anxieties projected onto a painfully incalculable world? Ambiguity is fine; confusion is not.

THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES is capably directed, features fine, compelling performances from its entire cast, and is technically impressive, but is all the paranormal activity merely so much ornamentation to what is finally the story of a grieving man refusing to let go of the past? If so, then the film shows the extent to which we, as a culture, have never relinquished the quaint Victorian sentimentality of transforming prolonged mourning into an obsession with spiritualism (which Freud himself was compelled to write about a century ago). Still, we found the film oddly compelling, and recommend it to readers interested in the intersection between the UFO phenomenon and paranormal activity.

Columbia Tristar's DVD contains the 28-chaptered film in a widescreen (2.31:1) anamorphic transfer on one side and a fullscreen transfer on the other. The transfer in each case is sharp and colorful, with vivid hues and accurate fleshtones, although we did notice some minor artifacting during a nighttime scene set in Connie's house on the preferred anamorphic version. The DD-5.1 soundtrack is fine, with excellent detail and atmospheric effects, and is available in both English and French options. The disc provides subtitling in English, French, and Spanish as well. Supplements include the 4m 46s music video, "Half Light," presented in DD-2.0 and directed by Pellington and performed by Low with musical support by tommandandy (who composed the film's musical score). The film's 2m 30s theatrical trailer round out the supplements. Information on the back of the keepcase indicate that the disc should includes production notes, but we were unable to find them. There is, however, a lengthy essay on the Mothman and the Silver Bridge disaster included on the inside booklet.

—Rebecca & Sam Umland

PET SEMATARY TWO

1992, Paramount Home Entertainment, DD-5.1 & 2.0/SS/MA/16:9/LB/ST/CC/+ \$24.99, 99m 3s, DVD-1

When the rights to the best-selling novel **PET SEMATARY** were purchased by Paramount Pictures, the traditional "sequel" clause was included in the contract under the verbal assurance that it would never actually be used. Therefore, it came as no surprise when the commercial success of Mary Lambert's 1989

adaptation resulted in this follow-up by the same director. The highly marketable name of the original author was kept completely off of this unsanctioned sequel (and, out of professional courtesy, it won't be mentioned in this review, either)—but the film's title cemented the unwanted association as effectively as if it had been **THE SHINING**.

Lambert's encore (identified onscreen as **PET SEMATARY II**, though the title is spelled out in full on the original poster and the video cover) begins as young Jeff Matthews (**TERMINATOR 2**'s Edward Furlong) witnesses the accidental electrocution death of his actress mother Renee Hallow (Darlanne Fluegel) on the set of **CASTLE OF TERROR** (a title meant to be generic, but which was previously used for the American TV release of Antonio Margheriti's **CASTLE OF BLOOD**, starring Barbara Steele). Jeff's veterinarian father Chase (Anthony Edwards) attempts to start a new life for himself, his son and his wife, Jeff's highly resented stepmother Marjorie (Sarah Trigger) in Ludlow, Maine, but Jeff won't let go of his mother's memory—or her possessions. An instant target for the bullies at his new school, Jeff finds a friend in Drew, the stepson of Gus, the local sheriff (Clancy Brown of **BUCKAROO BANZAI** and **HIGHLANDER**). It isn't long before Jeff is apprised of the supernatural properties of the nearby Micmac burial ground (located, of course, behind the pet cemetery), setting the stage for the violently abusive Gus to fatally shoot Drew's beloved dog. To the surprise of no one who saw the first film, said hound is soon resurrected Micmac-style, ultimately setting Gus up as the next candidate for special burial. But not even the disastrous results of that "experiment" can dissuade Jeff from the



Yesterday's pets return to teach the living a spelling lesson in PET SEMATARY TWO.

notion that he doesn't have to give up his mother, after all.

The original **PET SEMATARY** (book and movie) shocked and disturbed audiences with grisly horror that scarcely qualified as "escapist"—particularly when a dead three-year-old participated in the carnage. Yet even that morbidly downbeat tale could be read as a worst-case "when bad things happen to good people" scenario. Here, there's hardly a character worth rooting for, though the cast is completely professional and effective. Edwards plays a sympathetic father, but he's not the focus of attention. Furlong's Jeff is obsessive and selfish, and Gus is such a monstrous child and animal abuser while alive that it's difficult to understand what makes his reincarnation as a Micmac zombie significantly worse. To be sure, Brown steals what show there is as the undead sheriff—in particular, the "breakfast table" scene oozes with both menace and queasy humor and ought to

have been saved for a more ambitious project. But it's the inconsistency of his character that, in the end, sums up what's wrong with **PET SEMATARY II** as a whole. At one moment, he's a giggly ghoul; at a later point he seems to serve as a sort of spiritual guide to Jeff (as he invokes the rule "You bury your own," one can apparently take this to refer to either one's "own" family members or one's "own" murder victims). And finally—and most disappointingly—he's seen chasing his wife and son with an axe, shouting wisecracks as he chops through walls in a blatant attempt to drag the non-author in even deeper—though we're thankfully spared a "Heeeeere's Johnny!" Meanwhile, though no toddlers are involved this time around, the film proceeds as a non-stop parade of death, pain and trauma inflicted on young people and animals until one reaches the extra-gory climax, which must be counted as a complete dramatic failure. (Some of Steve Johnson's

excellent effects were noticeably trimmed for the sake of an R rating, but more than enough survived.) While Jeff obviously misses his mother, the audience is never made aware of just what he's missing—Renee is seen only as an on-set actress, a nightmare apparition and a zombie; not even the most gullible viewer could imagine at this point that she could come back and make everything "all better." **PET SEMATARY** wasn't designed to carry a sequel, and nothing to the contrary is proven by this misbegotten effort.

Misbegotten or not, **PET SEMATARY II** has been given attentive treatment on DVD. The 1:78:1 widescreen image seems a bit tight in the headroom department, but the colors are rich, while the soundtrack (which includes a Traci Lords vocal and another end-title song by the Ramones, who did the honors for Lambert's original) resonates in both 5.1 and two-channel Dolby Surround—a French-language stereo track has also been provided. In addition, the disc offers removable English-language subtitles (significantly paraphrased) and closed-captioning. Thirteen chapters have been assigned to the feature—the only visual extra is the red band theatrical trailer. —Shane M. Dallmann

THE PROWLER

aka **ROSEMARY'S KILLER**
1981, Blue Underground,
DD-2.0/MA/16:9/LB/+,
\$24.99, 88m 7s, DVD-0

When **HALLOWEEN** scored big numbers in 1978, it didn't take long for the slasher doctrine to become written in stone. This Joseph Zito thriller, which arrived only three years later, already seemed tired and formula-bound to many viewers; it does have some points in its favor, however,



Tom Savini's spectacularly gruesome make-up effects highlight Blue Underground's unrated edition of *THE PROWLER*.

and remains marginally better than many of the competing features from this time.

The film opens with a 1945 prologue, set at the Avalon Bay graduation dance. Three months after having sent her beau a "Dear John" letter, young Rosemary and her new boyfriend sneak off from the proceedings for a little necking at The Point. Not long after they start, a figure wearing army fatigues brutally kills the lovers with a pitchfork. The story picks up 35 years later, amidst preparations for the first grad dance since the tragedy. Deputy Mark London (Christopher Goutman) has to hold down the fort when Sheriff Fraser (Farley Granger) decides to go on his annual fishing trip, in spite of the festivities and the fact that a murderous felon from a nearby town is still on the loose. A killer (sporting the same get-up as his predecessor) begins to prey upon the students and staff, and almost manages to slay Mark's virginal girlfriend, Pam

(Vicky Dawson). While the dance continues on, the two sleuth around trying to apprehend the attacker, who has also taken the time to violate Rosemary's grave.

Shot as **THE GRADUATION**, Zito's film revels in its clichés to such an extent that screenwriters Neal F. Barbera and Glenn Leopold (who previously worked together writing the English dialogue for Smurf cartoons!) must have structured their story using a slasher movie checklist. In addition to the obligatory chaste heroine, we have the usual victims-to-be (a promiscuous girl and her lecherous boyfriend, a dope smoking coed), predictable false scares (though one did admittedly make us jump regardless), characters wandering off alone for no sane reason, and a ridiculous final shock that suffers from a serious case of **CARRIE** envy. There are several possible suspects, but the killer's identity is never really in doubt and there is also one of the genre's most obvious red herrings in the form

of Lawrence Tierney (as Rosemary's silent, wheelchair-bound father, who likes to peep at co-eds). Aside from these debits, nothing about **THE PROWLER** is overtly bad. Zito is able to generate a moderate amount of tension during the stalk-and-slash sequences and the picture is competently performed by its young cast (all of whom soon disappeared from the business). The primary asset, however, is unquestionably the contribution of special effects makeup master Tom Savini, whose gory setpieces include a memorably nasty shower murder, a bayonet through the head, and a graphic shotgun blast, similar to one he staged for **MANIAC** a few months earlier. If you miss the days when such gags were performed on-set, rather than staged with impersonal and aseptic CGI, Savini's work here will leave you impressed and suitably repulsed by their dramatic staging.

Released outside North America as **ROSEMARY'S KILLER** (the disc comes with an insert reproduction of the UK poster, which features a more interesting design than the bland American one-sheet), **THE PROWLER** sports a somewhat soft and hazy look that made the early '80s cassette releases from VCII and Astral Video seem to suffer from inept telecine work. Blue Underground's new 16:9 digital transfer both benefits and suffers from the technological advances made in recent years. Thanks to the added resolution, the 1.85:1 presentation often looks excessively grainy, but the detail is improved. Hues are sometimes on the light side and the aforementioned haze is still apparent (causing light sources to bloom noticeably) but these are part and parcel with the original

photography. The night sequences are not always ideally lit, but usually look solid here. Richard Einhorn's score (a complete departure from his electronic **SHOCK WAVES** soundtrack but almost as effective) and the dialogue come across cleanly in the serviceable mono sound mix. After some unrated playdates, several cuts had to be made to secure an R-rating for the film's wider theatrical release, but the DVD presents the splashy homicidal set-pieces in their entirety (oddly, while Astral's release was bluntly cut in several spots, the full-strength version ran a number of times on Canadian Pay TV).

Zito and Savini (who later worked together again on **FRIDAY THE 13TH: THE FINAL CHAPTER** and the "one man army" films **INVASION USA** and **RED SCORPION**) can be heard on a lively and amusing commentary track. In between poking fun at the make-up maestro's somewhat defective memory, the director imparts a good amount of information about the shooting and the business side of the project (the producer turned down an offer from Avco Embassy and released it himself on a regional basis, fearing that Avco's advance money would be all he would ever see). Zito erroneously states that Granger has since passed away (the actor is quite alive and still working, having played a supporting role in 2002's **THE NEXT BIG THING**) but is a very personable speaker and candid about the movie's limitations. Savini has also provided 9m 32s worth of on-set video footage for the supplementary section, showing how several of the murder sequences were staged. An extensive poster and still guide offers

more behind-the-scenes shots of Savini at work and a look at the UK and Japanese promo kits. A trailer is also included, but it apparently either lacked titles or bore the overseas handle as the **PROWLER** title card appears to be video generated. —John Charles

THE RETURN OF THE VAMPIRE

1943, Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, DD-1.0/ST/CC/+, \$19.95, 69m 10s, DVD-1

Of all the Hollywood studios, Columbia had least evolved a horror "house style" by the 1940s. A modestly-effective if badly-written quickie, **THE RETURN OF THE VAMPIRE** is essentially an imitation of the way things were done over at Universal, to the extent of using a star made into a genre icon by the rival studio in a transparent variation on his most famous role, plot licks from **DRACULA'S DAUGHTER** and **FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLF MAN** and the mix of foggy gothic and wartime topicality found in Universal's Sherlock Holmes series. It also fits into that occasional sub-genre (cf: **RETURN OF THE APE MAN, SON OF DRACULA**) of films that try to seem like sequels, though they are actually originals. Like the later **DRACULA AD 1972**, this is actually a brief sequel to its own extended 15m prologue.

A narrated flashback takes us to London in October 1918 as sage Professor Saunders (Gilbert Emery) persuades scientist Lady Jane Ainsley (Frieda Inescort) that a recent rash of anemia deaths are due to vampirism. After the Professor's young granddaughter is bitten, the pair track down and stake Armand Tesla (Bela Lugosi),



*Seen here with Frieda Inescort, Bela Lugosi donned his vampire's cape for only the third time in his screen career in 1943's *RETURN OF THE VAMPIRE*.*

"the depraved Romanian scientist who died in 1744." They incidentally rescue Tesla's hypnotised werewolf minion Andreas (Matt Willis) from a life of hirsute servitude. Dissolve to the Professor's account being read aloud in present-day blitzed London by Sir Frederick Fleet (Miles Mander), a Scotland Yard man who has found the manuscript after Saunders' recent death in a plane crash (which we are later told was caused by Tesla's "curse") and is thinking of prosecuting Lady Jane for the long-ago impalement—an interesting foreshadowing of the twist ending of Dan Curtis' **THE NIGHT STALKER**. A bomb has unearthed the vampire's corpse, comical cockney workmen remove the spike in its heart, and Tesla rises again to

overpower Andreas, pose as a German scientist lately escaped from the Nazis and plot the seduction into vampiredom of the now grown-up Nicky (Nina Foch), who is engaged to Lady Jane's wounded pilot/concert pianist son John (Roland Varno). The rest of the film shuffles through bits of the plot of **DRACULA**, with Andreas as an eventually-rebellious Renfield and Lady Jane as Van Helsing, though Sir Frederick remains skeptical even down to the last, to-the-audience gag line.

Though the film reveals its wet-nosed, surprisingly chatty werewolf in the first shot, with Willis averaging somewhere between Lon Chaney and Bert Lahr in performance style, director Lew Landers gives Lugosi a big build-up, concealing his face

behind a cloak-collar (we see a picture of Lugosi as Tesla as the frontispiece of a book he wrote when alive) and illustrating Tesla's vampiric lack of reflection in a mirror that shows an empty evening suit in the coffin. When Lugosi is finally shown full-face, 23m in, he seems rather a tame apparition, his Dracula glare muted and his curious cadences ill-served by Griffin Jay's blah dialogue and Landers' hurried, '40s-style pace. Inescort and Mander do their best with abominable writing, but everyone else (Lugosi included) finds it hard to get their mouths around the likes of "Now look here, with my own eyes, these here in the middle of my face, I saw him go out." Landers' best moments are tricks: Willis hustled out of frame in human

form and returning without a cut as a werewolf (presumably a stunt double), Tesla literally exploding into a cloud of living smoke at the sight of a small crucifix (though he hangs out unaffected in a graveyard full of crosses). While Universal's 1940s monster rallies ignored current events, **RETURN OF THE VAMPIRE** unusually dovetails its supernatural horrors with blackout curtains, sandbags and sirens, using air raids to kick off and close the 1943 segment of the story. The war also accounts for the strength of the homefront womenfolk (even the victim Nicky is in uniform) surrounded by male weaklings: a forgotten "honorably discharged" hero, moustached old codgers clearing away rubble ("Lord love a duck, 'oo'd go and steal a corpse?"), fey and middle-aged silly-ass Scotland Yard feeb. However, in the end, which features a **SON OF DRACULA**-ish dissolving wax Lugosi, the forces of good stay home talking while the vampire is undone by his suddenly-rebellious minion.

Columbia's fullscreen DVD, which claims to be "remastered in high definition," offers 28 chapter stops and spruces up a film usually seen in poor-quality prints: blitz stock footage remains scratchy and battered, but the bulk of the picture has lovely rich darks and glowing lights, with film *noir* highlights and Holmesian ground mists. The sole extras are trailers for **BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA** and **THE REVENGE OF FRANKENSTEIN**. The disc purportedly offers subtitles in English, French, Spanish and Japanese, but my copy weirdly has Japanese language menus and (removable) subs—suggesting an export disc slipped into the wrong case. —Kim Newman

SHOCK WAVES

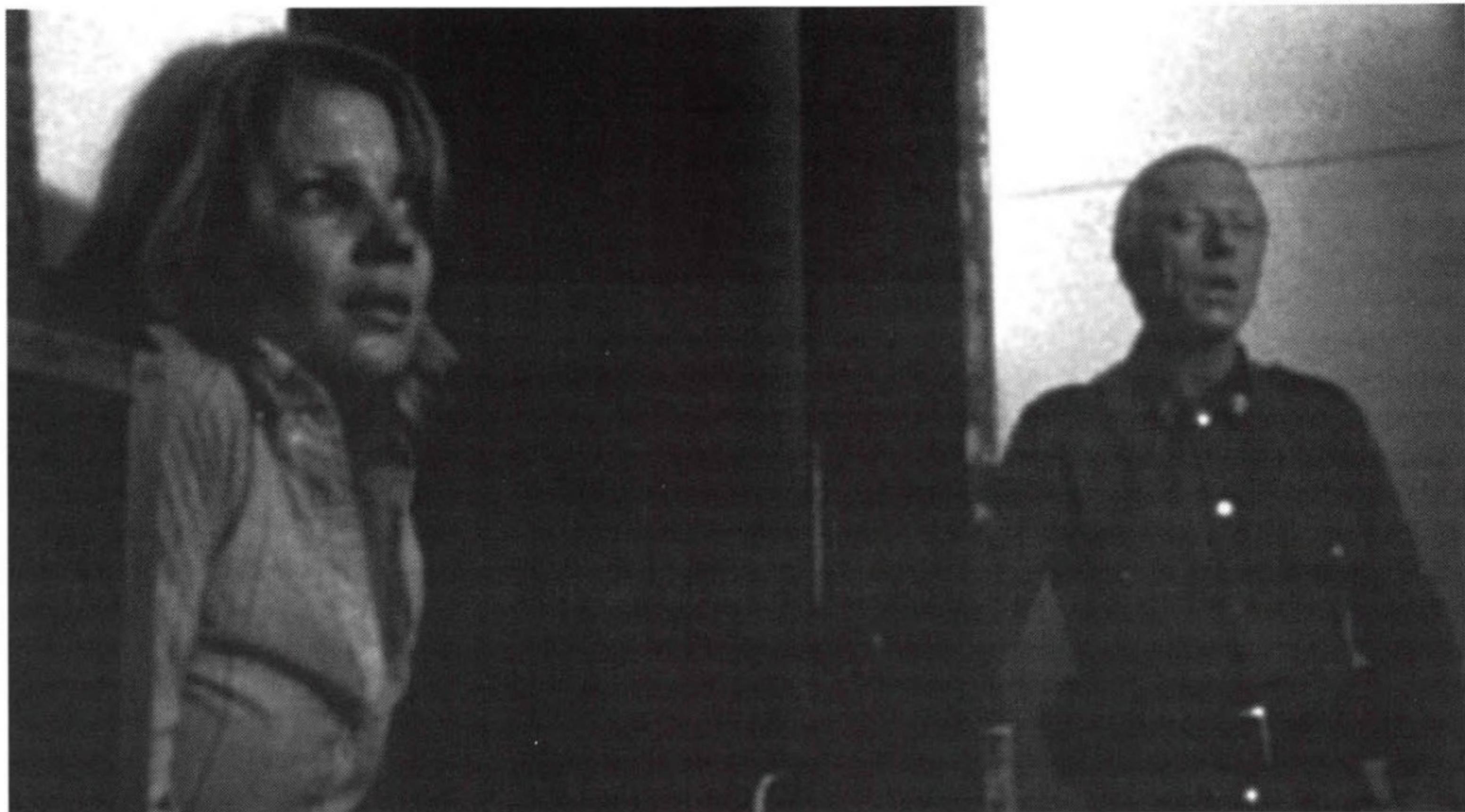
aka DEATH CORPS
1976, Blue Underground,
DD-2.0/MA/16:9/LB/+,
\$24.99, 84m 29s, DVD-0

A rundown tub offering excursions for scuba divers drifts into a bizarre solar phenomenon that portends of further dangers ahead in this atmospheric thriller, a considerable step above other Florida genre productions from this time. Even after the engine breaks down twice and the compass fails, cantankerous Captain Ben (John Carradine) refuses to turn back and, during the night, his vessel collides with another ship that appeared out of nowhere. Severe damage to the hull forces the passengers (including **THE DEAD ZONE**'s Brooke Adams, in her first lead role, and **FLIPPER**'s Luke Halpin) to disembark on a desolate island, where they find the remains of a lavish hotel. The sole inhabitant is a disfigured SS Commandant (Peter Cushing, with on-again, off-again accent) who regales the visitors with a most outlandish tale about secret experiments to create the ultimate invincible soldier. The bodies of murderers and sadists were transformed into soulless killers that could survive in any climate and, even, underwater. However, the beings proved difficult to control, and when it was clear that the war was lost, the Commandant scuttled his vessel, sending the undead troops to the bottom of the ocean. The aforementioned phenomenon has somehow caused the vessel to surface, unleashing the decayed but still formidable creatures, who begin to stalk their human counterparts.

By the mid-1970s, horror films had set sail from suggestive

shocks, moving full speed ahead towards more graphic thrills. Produced in 1975 as **DEATH CORPS**, this independent production's subtle approach and PG rating may explain why it was only a mild success theatrically, but the picture went on to gain a sizeable cult following via the ancillary markets. The fact that Carradine and Cushing only have extended cameos (and never even appear together onscreen) is disappointing, but they are still utilized effectively and the mood is consistently ominous once the setting shifts to the island. The movie also benefits enormously from Alan Ormsby's excellent make-up (not compromised at all by the underwater sequences) and Richard Einhorn's creepy electronic score (the latter may be the production's most accomplished component, effectively distracting one from the somewhat repetitive nature of the second half). The combination of supernatural elements and the real-life horrors of the SS also figured into a handful of other productions from this time, like Eurociné's atrocious "Nazis of the Living Dead" yarns **ZOMBIE LAKE** and **OASIS OF THE ZOMBIES** [reviewed VW 74:16] and **DEATH SHIP** (1980), an only slightly better Canadian effort, starring George Kennedy, about a prowling Nazi interrogation vessel manned by the ghosts of its crew.

SHOCK WAVES received a fairly high profile 1977 US release through Joseph Brenner Associates but most viewers likely caught it first either on THE CBS LATE MOVIE or via the mid-'80s Prism Entertainment videocassette release. The film was shot on Super 16 and blown up to 35mm; the negative has since disappeared, so the transfer for



Nazi zombies are back "from the depths of Hell's Ocean" to prey upon the living in the Florida-lensed SHOCK WAVES.

this DVD had to be culled from director Ken Wiederhorn's personal 35mm print. Blue Underground's anamorphic 1.85:1 transfer has been criticized in some quarters but, considering that the disc is tantamount to a rescue mission, it is quite presentable and better than acceptable. True, the image is consistently grainy and there are a few missing frames, along with mild traces of arc burn and wear. Contrasts are often weak (not surprising, given the budget and the fact that this is a standard release print, compared to the low contrast ones often used for transfers), but color and detail levels are often better than expected, particularly during well-lit moments. The mono sound is strong, with Einhorn's score coming across very well.

Blue Underground has equipped the disc with a number of extras, including an audio commentary featuring input from Wiederhorn, Ormsby, and Fred Olen Ray (who served as gofer/production photographer). The latter has the

sharpest memory, providing all sorts of trivia about the curmudgeonly Carradine and the gentlemanly Cushing (who were apparently a stark contrast in every way, save for their mutual love of Player's cigarettes, the most toxic brand on the market at the time), production mishaps, the supporting players' other parts, etc. Ormsby (who had previously created the zombies in **CHILDREN SHOULDN'T PLAY WITH DEAD THINGS**) talks about the challenge he faced coming up with make-up that would stay on when constantly exposed to salt water. Wiederhorn (who made his directorial debut here) is articulate and interesting, but his memories of the production and the picture itself are generally not very positive and he confesses outright to having little love for horror. The latter comment could validate the opinions of those who feel that his later work in the genre (**EYES OF A STRANGER**, **RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD PART II**, the FREDDY'S NIGHTMARES

TV series) left something to be desired, but as Ormsby points out, the fact that this picture looks and feels unlike what most people at the time were expecting is actually one of its basic strengths. Halpin (who has hardly aged a day in 25+ years) reminisces about the production in a contemporary interview (7m 43s), and there is the expected trailer (previously included on several Prism releases), a TV spot, and radio spots (the announcer mispronounces "Carradine" as "Carra-DINE" here but gets it right in the trailer). An extensive still, production art, and poster gallery even includes minutiae like a handwritten list of titles that Wiederhorn was considering (including "The Dead Don't Drown," "Nazis Beneath the Sea," and "Drowned Alive!"). A small reproduction of the memorable domestic poster (which makes the zombies look like 100 foot giants) is tucked inside the keepcase.
—John Charles

THE TOOLBOX MURDERS

1977, Blue Underground,
DD-2.0/MA/16:9/LB/+ \$24.99,
93m 40s, DVD-0

Despite pre-dating the release of **HALLOWEEN** and **FRIDAY THE 13TH**, this minor production ended up being one of the most notorious slasher movies, thanks to its frequent citation during the mid-1980s as a prime example of violence against women in movies. Over two successive evenings, four young women in an apartment complex (an alcoholic, a lesbian couple, and a model who dances suggestively in front of her window) are gruesomely dispatched by a killer clad in a black trenchcoat and ski mask. The perpetrator is superintendent Vance Kingsley (Cameron Mitchell), who chose the murder weapons (portable drill, claw hammer, screwdriver, and nailgun) from among the contents of his toolbox. Out to rid the world of immoral women because of some irrational belief that they were somehow responsible for the death of his young daughter, Kingsley proceeds to kidnap Laurie Ballard (former child actor Pamelyn Ferdin). A dead ringer for the deceased girl, Laurie tries to buy herself some time by telling the fanatical Kingsley what he wants to hear. Meanwhile, her brother (Nicholas Beauvy) and Kingsley's nephew (*LAND OF THE LOST*'s Wesley Eure), who obviously has some issues of his own, snoop around the murder scenes for clues.

Routinely directed and featuring the sort of cynically downbeat ending that had become *de rigueur* by the late '70s, **THE TOOLBOX MURDERS** derives almost all of its effectiveness

from the killings, which unfold accompanied only by the victims' screams, ambient sounds, and middle-of-the-road music emanating from record players or radios. This has the effect of making the setpieces impersonal and disturbing, but they all occur in the movie's first third, leaving the pedestrian storyline and Mitchell's eccentric performance to hold the viewer's attention. Fortunately, the actor's character tics and obvious bits of improvisation are very entertaining and add some much needed dimension to his religious zealot stereotype. The supporting players include Tim Donnelly (brother of the film's director, Dennis Donnelly) as the dense homicide cop in charge of the case, Aneta Corseaut (**THE BLOB**, **THE ANDY GRIFFITH SHOW**) as Laurie and Joey's overworked, absentee mother, and Cheech & Chong regular

Evelyn Guerrero as the screwdriver victim.

THE TOOLBOX MURDERS was released on video in the early '80s by VCI in a wretched presentation that bathed the entire film in a sickly shade of green. The company later reissued it via their United Home Video label with some much-needed color correction, but improvements were still needed. Blue Underground's anamorphic 1.80:1 transfer (not 1.66, as indicated on the case) is a major improvement, adding vibrancy and detail to a production that was among the ugliest-looking horror movies of its era. The audio is clear enough that the camera can be heard whirring away in the background of some shots.

The ever-perky Ferdin joins producer Tony DiDio and cinematographer Gary Graver on a commentary track that offers a satisfying amount of background

*Cameron Mitchell drills, bashes, stabs, and shoots his way through the "unclean women" of his apartment complex in **THE TOOLBOX MURDERS**.*



on the picture. Everyone has a story about Mitchell, who really threw himself into the role and displayed some pronounced idiosyncrasies (like munching on cloves of garlic and breaking into the score from *THE KING AND I*, which he had appeared in on Broadway early in his career). Graver is a great source of trivia and also discusses his work with Orson Welles, Al Adamson, Sam Fuller, and Billy Wilder. By contrast, DiDio is quite foggy on some topics (particularly the actors' backgrounds and the horror genre in general) but informative on others (like how the picture was later held up by programs like *60 MINUTES* and *DONAHUE* as a prime example of slasher movie misogyny). Ferdin (who had never seen the whole movie prior to the recording) has fond memories and a great deal of affection for Mitchell, with whom she had worked previously on the *HIGH CHAPARRAL* series. Conspicuously absent from the track is Dennis Donnelly, who had previously helmed only episodic television shows and went right back to doing them after finishing this.

In addition to the domestic trailer (which spuriously claims that the film is based on a true murder case), TV and radio spots, there is a poster and still gallery, and a Mitchell bio/abbreviated filmography. "I Got Nailed in **THE TOOLBOX MURDERS**" (8m 5s) is a recent interview with nailgun victim Marianne Walter, who went on to a career in hardcore porn features as "Kelly Nichols." Walter (who was a model at the time and spends much of her screentime here naked) looks back on the part with affection and absolutely no embarrassment, even admitting to attending the local premiere

with her two brothers! Interestingly, on the poster reproduction included in the keep case, the drawing of Walter has fewer soap suds obscuring her breasts than that seen on the disc's front cover. Not only can a film like **THE TOOLBOX MURDERS** seemingly no longer be made in these politically correct times, it apparently can no longer even be advertised in the same way! —John Charles

THE UNEARTHLY

1957, Image Entertainment,
DD-1.0/LB/16:9/, \$24.99,
69m 51s, DVD-1

THE UNEARTHLY, a destitute science-fiction shocker from the late 1950s, has been given a DVD transfer worthy of King Solomon's home theater. Resplendent with razor-sharp detail and a luminous B&W surface, this dreadful movie is a piece of coal polished by some digital Superman into a dazzling diamond. It's still only costume jewelry, but in this new incarnation, the movie seems more like a sly parody of bad filmmaking rather than the real thing. Suddenly, everything wrong with **THE UNEARTHLY** seems perfectly right.

The company of John Carradine, Allison Hayes and Myron Healy feels right under any circumstances. And with Arthur Batanides (**THE LEECH WOMAN**), Sally Todd (**FRANKENSTEIN'S DAUGHTER**), Roy Gordon (**WAR OF THE COLOSSAL BEAST**, **ATTACK OF THE 50 FOOT WOMAN**) and Tor Johnson (as some sort of championship wrestling-butler prowling the sidelines like a zombified Mr. French), the cast qualifies as a dream-team of low-budget moviemaking. Carradine plays Dr. Conway, who—convinced that

his super-duper artificial gland will produce a race of Super-Duper Humans—lures patients to his remote haunted house clinic as laboratory fodder for his experiments. Carradine looks incredibly gaunt but, with the angular twists and turns of his limbs, he evokes the gnarly strength of a joshua tree. Ever the zealous practitioner of his craft, Carradine delivers his preposterous dialogue as if standing centerstage at the Globe Theater, an aristocratic scarecrow in a labcoat fit for a meloncholy Dane.

Allison Hayes, as one of Dr. Conway's glandular guinea pigs, is the exact opposite of a scarecrow. She's one year away from her bust-out performance in 1958's **ATTACK OF THE FIFTY FOOT WOMAN** but those extra 534 inches would add nothing to the confectionery sexiness she projects in **THE UNEARTHLY**. Her character, Grace Thomas, is the shy, sensitive type—an altogether different kind of stretch for this actress. The contrast between her hot-rod figure and demure demeanor works like gangbusters; with her ample sexpot allure kept teasingly under wraps, she's extremely alluring. I'm buying what she's not selling. Myron Healy completes the terrific trio as an escaped criminal coerced into service by Carradine. Healy's remarkably long career (beginning in 1943, and stretching into the '90s) made him a ubiquitous player in our pop culture consciousness. Look to the periphery of any low budget horror film or Western and Myron Healy will probably be one of the extras littering the set. The very essence of bland, Healy seemed to use the same expression for all his roles (a cheat-sheet for Healy's performances:

if he survived at the end of a film, then he was probably playing the good guy). Marylyn Buferd is Carradine's lovestruck assistant, Dr. Sharon Gilchrist. Her dedication never wavers; whether mopping down the frenzied doctor as he operates on a fresh subject, or primly admiring the obscenely quivering viscera he fondles with his forceps, her ardor is unabated. A match made in the Mad Scientist section of the personals, they both seem equally aroused at the sight of the glistening gland that he lovingly cups in his hand. Conway thrusts this grisly organ toward her like a freshly picked daisy from the garden and Dr. Sharon, instead of running for the hills like any sane woman, becomes even more inflamed. Lucky Dr. Conway.

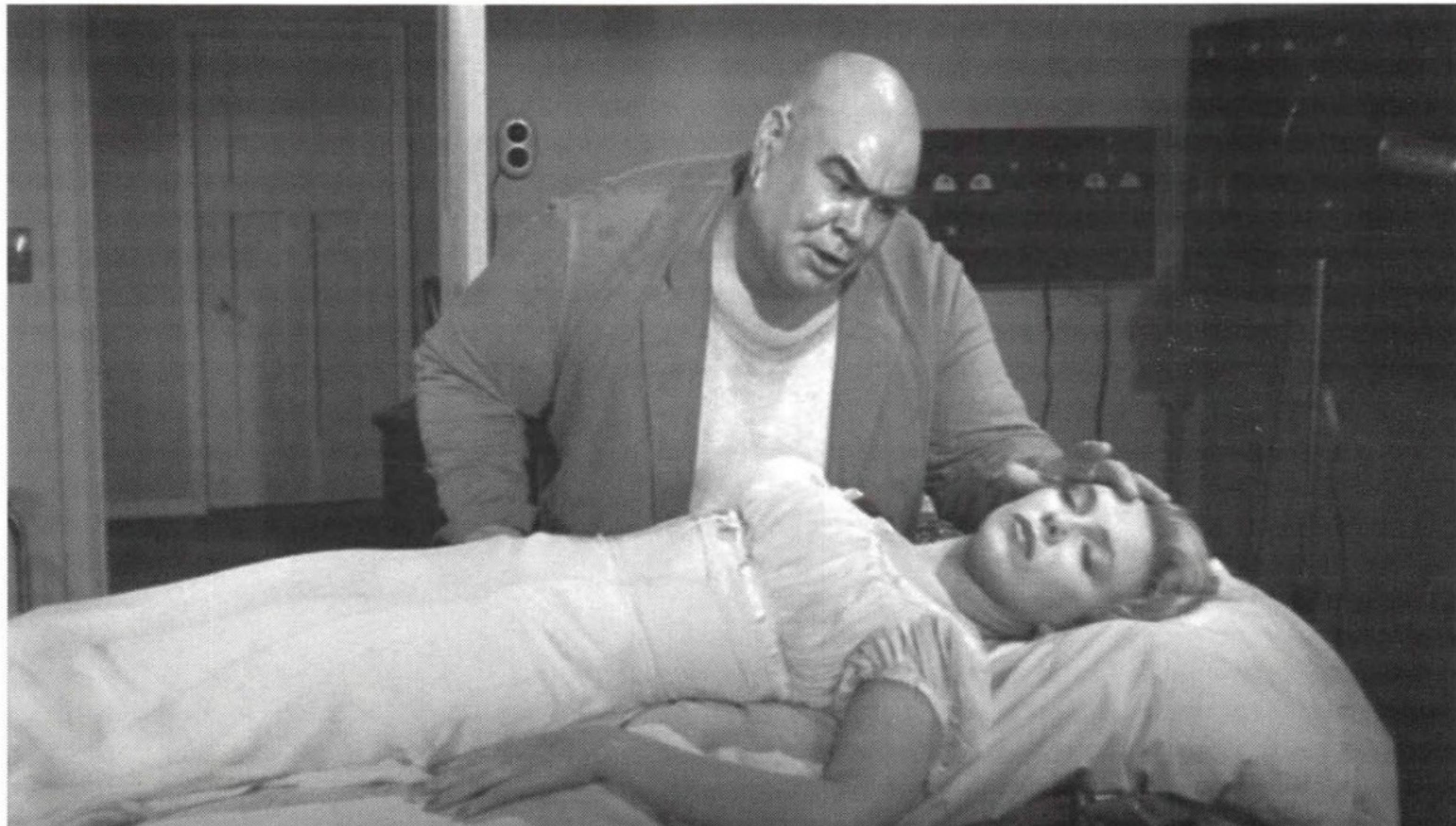
Tor Johnson—as an actor, he could do only one thing, but he did it so well! Actually, he didn't need to do anything but show up: he was the 1950s' Rondo Hatton, a natural special effect needing

no make-up and certainly no hair stylist. A mouth-breathing goyle who would have been at home on a turret at Notre Dame, his startling appearance, consisting of just two shapes, one very large circle for his body and a much smaller one for his head, suggested a lobotomized Buddha. Tor has the best line in the film and possibly the best line of his career. Carradine is treating his patients to an after-dinner organ recital (Wurlitzer, not pineal) as Tor saunters into the room to break up the party with "Time for go to bed." He delivers it with the kind of deadpan minimalist authority that would have brought tears to the eyes of Samuel Beckett. It did to mine.

Along with the exceptional transfer, the mono soundtrack is fine, with all of Carradine's Shakespearean inflections given full *basso profundo* gravity. The extras consist of a very (very) few stills and lobby card.

—Charlie Largent

"Time for go to bed," purrs the comforting Tor Johnson in that lovably leechy lullaby known as THE UNEARTHLY.



WILD STRAWBERRIES

Smultronstället

"The Wild Strawberry Patch"

1957, Criterion, DD-1.0/MA/ST/+,\$39.95, 91m 5s, DVD-1

The oeuvre of Swedish auteur Ingmar Bergman contributed to the assumption we now take for granted, that the works of strong filmmakers exemplify a cinema of personal expression. **WILD STRAWBERRIES** (whose Swedish title literally translates as "The Wild Strawberry Patch") is a fine example of the cinema of personal expression.

The film's protagonist, Isak Borg, even shares the initials of its writer and director. Professor Borg (played by the great Swedish director Victor Sjöström) is a lonely old physician who is to be awarded an honorary degree at Lund Cathedral. Although his life as a doctor has been filled with honors and awards and he has earned the esteem of his colleagues and patients, his inner

life is in turmoil. The night before he drives down the coast to receive his award, he dreams of his own death (in a chilling surreal sequence). He is plagued by painful but vivid memories of his youth, when he was in love with Sara (Bibi Andersson), who jilted him and married his brother. Professor Borg is accompanied on his journey by his daughter-in-law, Marianne (Ingrid Thulin), who reveals to him the degree of strain in her marriage to his son, Evald (Gunnar Björnstrand). As Borg drives down the coast to Lund, he must face both his failures (as father, as husband), his past mistakes, and own inevitable death.

Isak Borg (his name literally means "ice fortress") is a man who externally, at least, has everything one could

want, but still finds his life both empty and unhappy. In the image of the wild strawberry patch is compressed his entire youthful experience: his lost love, Sara, whom we first see picking wild strawberries; the idyllic summers he spent with his family; his own lost past. These pleasant memories stand in stark contrast to those concerning his late wife (Gertrud Fridh), who, in a sequence startling for its time, is revealed to have been an adulteress, emotionally and sexually estranged from her husband. Now approaching death, Borg seeks to reconcile himself with what happened in his life, trying to understand what went wrong, the reasons for his loneliness and inner emptiness. As the

elderly protagonist, Victor Sjöström is utterly remarkable; an old man himself at the end of an illustrious career, his face captures every nuance of Borg's character—the regret, the sadness, and, at the end, his reconciliation with life (and death), captured in a single powerful image from his past, the memory of his parents in an idyllic setting, sitting together on a summer day under umbrellas on the wind-blown shore of an immense lake. **WILD STRAWBERRIES** further solidified Bergman's stature as one of the world's most distinctive filmmakers, and was released shortly before the film that brought him international acclaim, **THE SEVENTH SEAL** (1957). It well deserves its critical reputation.

Victor Sjöstrom converses with Bibi Andersson, the memory of the wife he might have had, in Ingmar Bergman's WILD STRAWBERRIES.



Criterion's transfer is outstanding, capturing the luminous quality of Gunnar Fischer's superb B&W cinematography. The print source was a 35mm composite print, made from the original camera negative, which underwent a digital "scrubbing" with the MTI Digital Restoration system. The DD-1.0 soundtrack is also very fine, nicely detailed and without noticeable hiss, pops, or scratches. Also included on the disc is an excellent audio commentary by a critic we have always found to be one of Bergman's best, Peter Cowie, who provides extensive details about the production but also how moments in the film are reflected in other of Bergman's films. Cowie also contributed the liner notes.

Criterion has included on the DVD a 90m 35s documentary from 1998, **INGMAR BERGMAN ON LIFE AND WORK**, a series of conversations between Bergman and writer and filmmaker Jörn Donner that originally appeared on Swedish television. In it, the remarkably robust (then 80-year-old) Bergman voices his displeasure with the notion of a cinema of personal expression, saying that "Nobody today knows the names of those who built Chartres Cathedral." The suggestion is that perhaps his films have been understood largely as autobiographical, and he would have preferred to work anonymously. Yet he also reviews his films and their recurring themes, and for those interested in Bergman's films, his remarks and observations included on the documentary is essential viewing. Also included is a stills gallery, featuring several dozen behind-the-scenes production photos. The new English subtitles are splendid.—Rebecca & Sam Umland



Realize your dream of playing Strip Poker with Yutte Stensgaard in **ZETA ONE**.

ZETA ONE

aka **THE LOVE FACTOR**,
ALIEN WOMEN

1969, *Salvation Films*, DD-1.0/+,\$14.99, 85m 38s, DVD-0

AU PAIR GIRLS

1972, *Salvation Films*, DD-1.0/+,\$14.99, 86m 29s, DVD-0

Nothing sums up the death of classic British cinema better than these two DVD releases from Salvation Films (distributed by Image Entertainment), as part of their Jezebel line of softcore sex romps that were all the rage in the days before full blown pornography. Originally produced by Tigon Films, Hammer House's Wardour Street neighbors and occasional rival in the horror trade (Michael Reeves' **WITCHFINDER GENERAL** and Piers Haggard's **BLOOD ON SATAN'S CLAW** shamed Hammer at their best),

these cheap Union Jack offshoots provide a tutorial in the economics of slumming, from Zed to A.

No one knows much about Michael Cort, the possibly pseudonymous director of **ZETA ONE**—although it's conceivable that no one has bothered to find out. Written by Cort, Alistair McKenzie and production designer Christopher Neame (the son of director Ronald Neame later turned up as a vampire wannabe in Hammer's **DRACULA AD 1972** and has been seen more recently as the harried cooking instructor in TV spots for the T.G.I. Friday's restaurant franchise), **ZETA ONE** was inspired by a popular magazine of its day and involves a battle of wits and wills waged by an intergalactic race of super-women from the planet Angvia (think about it) led by the glamorous Zeta One (Dawn Addams) against Earthbound criminal mastermind Major

. D V D s

Bourdon (James Robertson Justice). Knowing that the Angvians rely on kidnapped females to flesh out their ranks, Bourdon and his adjutant Swyne ("Carry On" regular Charles Hawtrey) intercept one of Zeta's intended targets, a stripper named Edwina Strain (Wendy Lingham), to whom they attach a homing device. On Angvia, Edwina withstands a psychedelic trial of assimilation but is ultimately rejected, forcing Bourdon and his tweedy minions to torture an Angvian girl for the location of her home planet. Just as British secret agent James Word (Robin Hawdon, Edward Judd's copyboy in **THE DAY THE EARTH CAUGHT FIRE**) swings into action against Bourdon (dubbed "Public Enemy No. 1" for reasons no one bothers to explain), Zeta deploys a strike force of interstellar Amazons to actuate her scorched Earth policy, "Action 69."

An only-in-it-for-the-money aura pervades **ZETA ONE**, which proves itself an impoverished and shame-faced affair for all involved, from executive producer Tony Tenser (Roman Polanski's **REPULSION** and **CUL-DE-SAC**) to name-value star James Robertson Justice (on the cusp of retirement and death). Somewhat akin to Roger Vadim's **BARBARELLA** and Mario Bava's **DANGER: DIABOLIK**, **ZETA ONE** suffers by comparison, and shows how far behind the times the British film industry was by the end of the decade it helped define. Produced for the ignominious raincoat crowd (who rate a jokey cameo), **ZETA ONE** kicks off like a porn loop, with the nominal secret agent hero agreeing to a game of strip poker to forestall relating details of his last assignment to

a female colleague (Yutte Stensgaard). From the fade-out of the opening titles to the last ante-up, this stultifying prologue lasts nearly 20m (Stensgaard unbuckles her bra around the 17m mark, with a coy "Raise you one") before the plot of **ZETA ONE** can begin. (This framing device seems like a last minute bid to clarify an incomprehensible, perhaps even unfinished film.) The dialogue strains for shock value ("There's a bitch in the bushes") and several pivotal characters (Edwina, Bourdon and Swyne) inexplicably disappear from the film well short of the *dénouement*. Ignoble in the extreme, **ZETA ONE** is such a cinematic embarrassment that one keeps expecting George Sanders to put in an appearance.

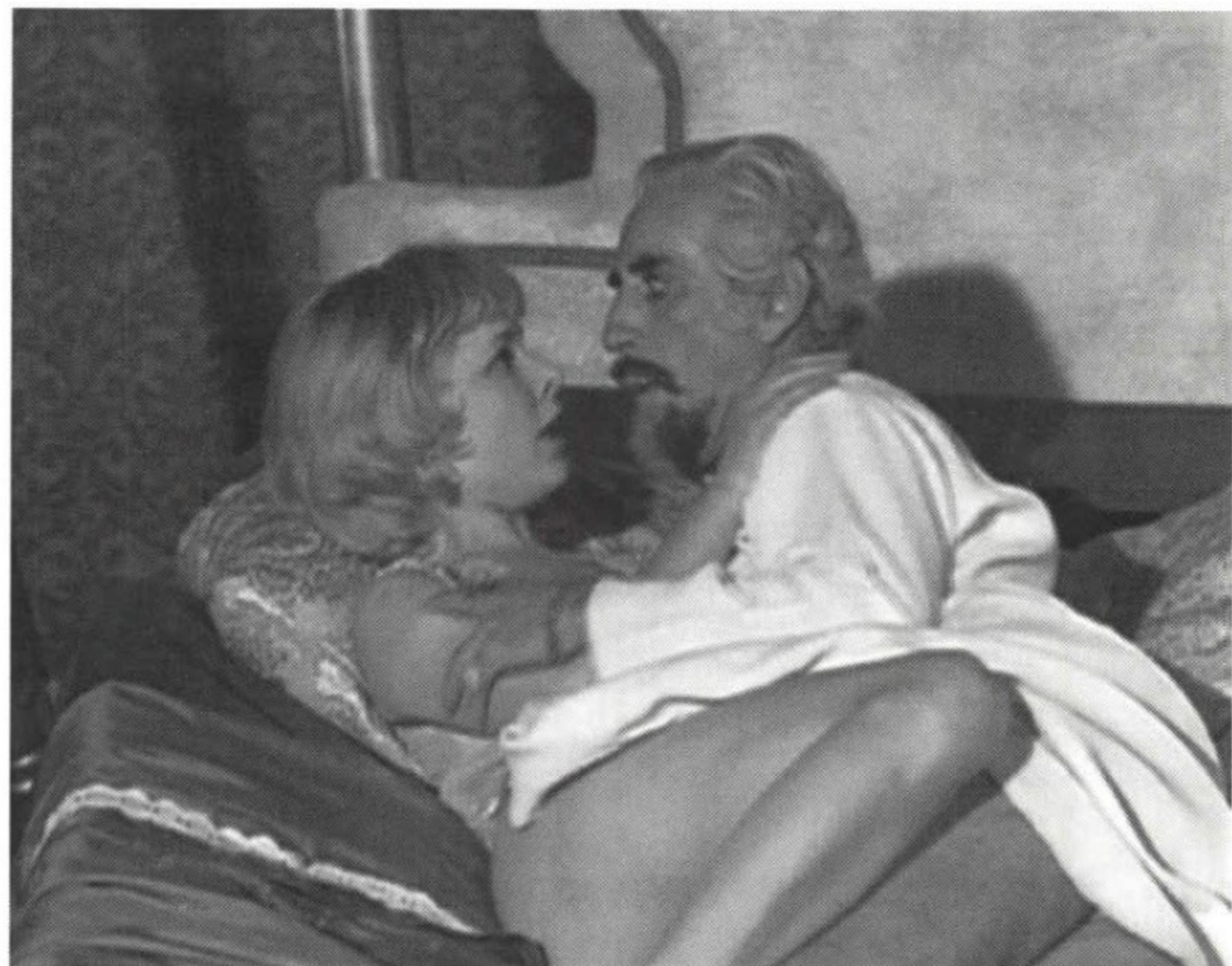
Keeping the proceedings from being an utter drag are the film's bevy of (often bare-breasted) beauties. Dawn Addams (who took it on the chin in **THE TWO FACES OF DR. JEKYLL** a decade earlier) and Kirsten Betts would both turn up in Hammer's **THE VAMPIRE LOVERS** the next year, while Stensgaard would inherit the Karnstein overbite for its 1971 sequel **LUST FOR A VAMPIRE**. Valerie Leon (**BLOOD FROM THE MUMMY'S TOMB**) and Brigitte Skay (seen in Mario Bava's **BAY OF BLOOD** and his **RASHOMON**-inspired sex farce **FOUR TIMES THAT NIGHT**) make for a strapping pair of everything-but-the-nipple extraterrestrials, and it's great to get a closer look at Nita Lorraine, briefly glimpsed as the Devil's fetish girl in Tigon's **CURSE OF THE CRIMSON ALTAR** in 1968. That year, Anna Gaël made an international impression as half of **THERESE AND ISABELLE**'s Sapphic equation

(co-star Essy Persson was put to work in **CRY OF THE BANSHEE**, produced in 1969 by Tigon's occasional partner American International Pictures) and appeared opposite Christopher Lee in the 1976 comedy **Dracula Père et Fils** (US: **DRACULA AND SON**). Cinematographer Jack Atchelor had been a camera operator on Richard Lester's madcap Beatles vehicle **HELP!** before graduating to the rank of DP with this and Tigon's **HAUNTED HOUSE OF HORROR** (US: **HORROR HOUSE**, 1969). Atchelor's work here is undistinguished, but it didn't require the services of Freddie Francis or Christopher Challis to make these lovelies look fab.

The standard presentation of **ZETA ONE** on this all-region DVD from Salvation only seems to hem in the visuals during the opening credits. While the transfer is relatively sharp and vivid, the production's obvious lack of wherewithal keeps **ZETA ONE** looking drab and tea-stained throughout. (There is also a noticeable degree of flicker towards the end of the interminable strip poker sequence.) Interiors are harshly lit and unflattering to skin tones, and the mono sound is tinny but acceptable. Scenes set on Angvia fare considerably better, with the psychedelic colors and optical effects consistently eye-pleasing. The disc has been given 15 chapters, and extras consist of a 2m fullscreen trailer and separate galleries for production stills (38), lobby cards (8), video art (one VHS slipcover and a rejected DVD design) and advertising materials. A clip of one advance review has **ZETA ONE**'s number, declaring it guilty of "titillation without consummation."

Imagine Austin Powers adapting LITTLE WOMEN and you won't be far off the scent of **AU PAIR GIRLS**. This 1972 farce was actually helmed by Val Guest, keeping busy at the time by directing episodes of THE PERSUADERS for ITC following the disaster of helming the unreleased sci-musical **TOO-MORROW** (1969) for co-producers Harry Saltzman and rock impresario Don Kirshner. Having not made a farthing off **TOO-MORROW** (which starred a then-unknown Olivia-Newton John), Guest jumped at the chance to cash in on the fad for British sex films. In London, four girls from all points of the compass arrive at the offices of the Overseas Employment Agency for assignments as *au pairs*: Danish Randi (Gabrielle Drake) is placed with the bumbling son (Richard O'Sullivan) of a humorless industrialist (John Le Mesurier), while Swedish Anita is retained by a stuffy civil servant (Geoffrey Bayldon), German Christa (Nancie Wait) is given the care of a libertine teenager, and the Chinese Nan Lee (Me Me Lai) is presented as a plaything for an immature piano prodigy (Julian Barnes, seen previously in Michael Armstrong's **THE HAUNTED HOUSE OF HORROR** aka **HORROR HOUSE**, opposite Richard O'Sullivan). Over the course of 24-hours, the girls all come to learn that the job description "light domestic duties" doesn't explain the half of it.

In his liner notes for this Salvation DVD, Marc Morris explains that producer Guido Cohen was looking for a follow-up to his horror comedy **BURKE AND HARE** (aka **THE HORRORS OF BURKE AND HARE**, 1971), and found it in a story by David Grant that was worked into a screenplay by Guest and David Adnopus. Sadly, the script rarely rises above



Astrid Frank finds herself in a romantic clinch with Ferdy Mayne in Val Guest's bid in the softcore sweepstakes, AU PAIR GIRLS.

flabby double entendres ("First you tear me two times, then you wet me") and belated hippie bashing ("Ricky Strange is appearing at Groover's tonight and I'm not missing the freakout of the month for any bloody *au pair!*"), but Guest keeps the film moving and his cast hits its marks without obvious shame. Richard O'Sullivan was a child actor who graduated to a lead role in Thames Television's **MAN ABOUT THE HOUSE** series (which beget **THREE'S COMPANY** in the US). Gabrielle Drake (sister of folk singer Nick Drake) had been purple-wigged Moonbase Commander Gay Ellis on Gerry and Sylvia Anderson's **U.F.O.** series. Astrid Frank had played a pouty *au pair* previously in Max Pecas' **Claude et Greta** (reviewed as **HER AND SHE AND HIM**, VW 60:19) and seems to relish her role as the unfettered Anita. Still showing a bit of baby fat, Me Me Lai is slow to disrobe, which may surprise fans of her work in Italian cannibal films. British horror enthusiasts will get a kick out of

seeing Rosalie Crutchley (**THE HAUNTING**), John Standing (**TORTURE GARDEN**), Milton Reid (**NIGHT CREATURES**) and Ferdy Mayne (**THE FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS**) in small roles asking very little of them, but which they perform with consummate professionalism. Also of note is the use of Oakley Court, seen in a number of UK-lensed horrors, both Hammer (**THE BRIDES OF DRACULA**) and other (**VAMPYRES**).

Released in the United States by Cannon in May of 1973, **AU PAIR** girls did make it to video in Great Britain but has rarely been seen on this side of the pond since Cinemax turned its back on sexy '70s imports in the mid-to-late 1980s. Salvation presents a standard-framed, somewhat imperfect transfer of the film on this otherwise glossy DVD. The presence of halved reel change marks indicates that the shooting ratio was probably something like 1.66:1, but the fullscreen presentation never seriously affects one's appreciation of the film.

The transfer has a grainy aspect that is likely due to the original elements and, while the colors are often ugly and garish (with skin tones looking a bit pink), the viewing experience is probably not much different from catching the film in its initial run in a disreputable cinema along with other members of "the Raincoat Brigade." (Cinematographer John Wilcox had been a cameraman on Carol Reed's **THE THIRD MAN** and went on to shoot horror product for Hammer Studios and its rivals Amicus and Tyburn.) The mono sound is fine, if a tad shrill. Salvation has included a gallery of 8 stills from the film, along with its original pressbook and 8 lobby cards. A theatrical trailer (2m 15s) is also included, which partially censors Astrid Frank's mock-innocent gag line "I work with them all day and in the evening I play with myself with TV." You figure out what put the censor on point.

—Richard Harland Smith

Imports

LE AMANTI DEL MOSTRO

"The Monster Lovers"
1973, Shoarma Digital, DD-2.0/LB/+,
\$19.95, 83m 39s, DVD-0 (Italy)

One of Klaus Kinski's most difficult-to-locate horror films (outside of Italy, anyway) has finally made its digital debut in the form of an English subtitled DVD from Shoarma Digital, one of the more intriguing "wink-wink-nudge-nudge" DVD companies offering up rare genre fare. **Le amanti del mostro** is one of two movies shot back-to-back in Istanbul by Sergio Garrone (**Django, il bastardo**, 1969) in 1973; its companion feature, **La mano che nutre la morte** ("The

Hand Which Feeds Death"), features an almost identical cast and crew, as well as shared footage. Both films were released a month apart in Italy in 1974, but they were never exported. Kinski apparently made a bit of a splash with the Turkish media during the films' production, as tales of his erratic on- and off-set behavior made the rounds in various

local publications. In one interview with Turkish journalists, Kinski even made reference to his forthcoming biopic **Paganini** —interesting, given that the project was still many years away from being realized.

La mano che nutre la morte (previously available on VHS from Luminous Film & Video Wurks, subtitled into

AMEDEO MELLONE Presenta Una Produzione CINE EQUIPE

KLAUS KINSKI in



LE AMANTI DEL MOSTRO con KATIA CHRISTINE

con MARZIA DAMON • Musica ELIO MAESTOSI - STEFANO LIBERATI
Dirette da STEFANO LIBERATI • Edizioni musicali C.A.M.
Scritto e Diretto da SERGIO GARRONE • EASTMANCOLOR Colore della TELECOLOR

English from the cut Turkish version), arguably the better of the duo, is another entry in the facial surgery horror films that began with Georges Franju's classic trend-setter *Les Yeux sans visage* [US: THE HORROR CHAMBER OF DR. FAUSTUS aka EYES WITHOUT A FACE; 1959]. *Le amanti del mostro*, on the other hand, takes its cue from much older source material, being a loose (very loose) amalgamation of plot elements from Mary Shelley's FRANKENSTEIN and Robert Louis Stevenson's DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE.

Alex (Kinski) and wife Anna (Dutch actress Katia Christine, the blonde under the scalpel in the "William Wilson" segment of SPIRITS OF THE DEAD) relocate to the Russian countryside in order to take up residence in Anna's childhood home, in an effort to resuscitate their unimpassioned marriage. When Anna gets friendly with a handsome neighbor (played by former Turkish matinee idol Ayhan Isik), Alex turns his back on Anna and begins spending his free time in the mansion's basement, where he stumbles upon notes left behind by Anna's deceased father, a scientist. Driven by anxiety and jealousy, Alex attempts to recreate his father-in-law's experiments in the reanimation of the dead. In a scene that makes even less sense to write about than it does to watch, Alex is struck by a loose wire after mutilating a dead dog, and is instantly transformed into a murderous beast. Before you can say "Edward Hyde," Alex is prowling the countryside, randomly killing innocents while his jealousy toward Anna continues to grow even more uncontrollable.

Almost completely void of gore and suspense (outside of a revolting dog disembowelment

scene), *Le amanti del mostro* is nevertheless worth watching for a number of reasons. It's certainly the sunniest Italian gothic we've seen, with most of the film unfolding outdoors and in broad daylight. Visual quotes from other, better films abound; there's even a restaging of a famous scene in James Whale's FRANKENSTEIN, when a local villager parades the dead body of his child through the center of town. The film contains a number of oddball moments, including a shot of Anna's father's altar (also seen in *La mano che nutre la morte*) bearing the name... Ivan Rassimov! Despite fine performances from all three acting actors (Christine, in particular, acquits herself well in her scenes with Kinski), Garrone wisely hangs all his hopes on Kinski himself—or, to be more specific, Kinski's face. Without much of a script to speak of, Garrone bides his time for the first half, and once Kinski begins his familiar wide-eyed frothing, the film almost takes flight. Garrone trains his camera on Kinski's sweaty, blotched face and reveals more horror in the pores of his skin than most actors can generate with their entire bodies and buckets of latex. The downbeat finale is particularly effective, with a genuinely disturbing scene that must have given poor Ms. Christine a case of whiplash.

A Turkish-Italian co-production with a German leading man and Dutch leading lady, *Le amanti del mostro*'s mixed pedigree alone qualifies it as a curiosity, but it is a worthwhile curiosity. None of the local supporting cast are credited, but fans of Turkish pop cinema may recognize—as an unfortunate bum lynched by an angry mob—

Erol Tas, the big-browed villain of Yilmaz Atadeniz's *Yilmayan Seytan* (aka *L'Invincible Batman*, 1972 [reviewed VW 80:37-39]). Another oddity in the credits is the inclusion of one Stella Calderoni. Although she is credited in both of Garrone's films—and there is indeed an actress in *La mano che nutre la morte* who looks like she might be a relative of Rita Calderoni, the frequent fetish star of Renato Polselli movies—we could not spot her in *Le amanti del mostro*.

Bearing in mind Kinski's infamous on-set tirades, Shoarma has provided an interesting extra in the form of a videotaped German talk-show featuring Kinski, who barely holds onto his patience while being grilled by a witless host. Also provided is a surprisingly poignant series of candid and production photos spanning Kinski's entire career. Unfortunately, the film itself is mastered from an Italian VHS source (the image bears a tell-tale "CVR" logo) making this DVD less a labor of love and more like one of instant gratification; this is especially galling, given the apparent difficulty of locating a copy of the disc free of defects, as they are prone to tiling and lock-ups. The image is acceptable, letterboxed with vivid colors and a reasonable degree of detail, but it still looks like an old VHS tape. Still, for viewers interested in seeing the film with English subtitles, this is presently the only game in town. Hopefully, another company with better resources will someday give *Le amanti del mostro* the DVD presentation it deserves.

The disc is available domestically from Luminous Film and Video Wurks (see Sources). —David White & Kaya Ozkaracalar





By Douglas E. Winter

Second Best

Although heroic and at times heavenly, Howard Shore's music for **THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS** (Reprise/WMG Soundtracks 48379-2, \$19.99, 19 tracks, 72m 46s) doesn't quite fulfill the promise of his Watchdog "Best of the Year 2001" and Academy Award-winning score for **THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING**.

Perhaps it's the nature of scoring for the second act of a trilogy: Themes established in the first film are reinvented and integrated with new compositions in a work that is as transitional as the middle film itself. Shore pursues the *leitmotif* constructs of his original **LOTR** score into more brooding realms, using a diverse array of world instruments and choral atmospheres; and his dense, deep brass orchestrations sound even more Wagnerian. The real problem is that the cues, although undeniably powerful on screen, are diffuse; and their presentation on CD is not as listenable as a whole, as their predecessors.

FELLOWSHIP's featured songstress, Enya, is supplanted here by a prime cast of vocalists: Isabel Baykadian, Sheila Chandra, Ben Del Maestro, and Elizabeth Fraser; but the concluding "Gollum's Song," performed by Emilliana Torrini (doing her best to imitate Bjork), drifts into the dreaded Oscar®-baiting "Best Song" category.

Each standard jewel case edition of **THE TWO TOWERS** features one of five "exclusive collectible character cards" and enhanced multimedia

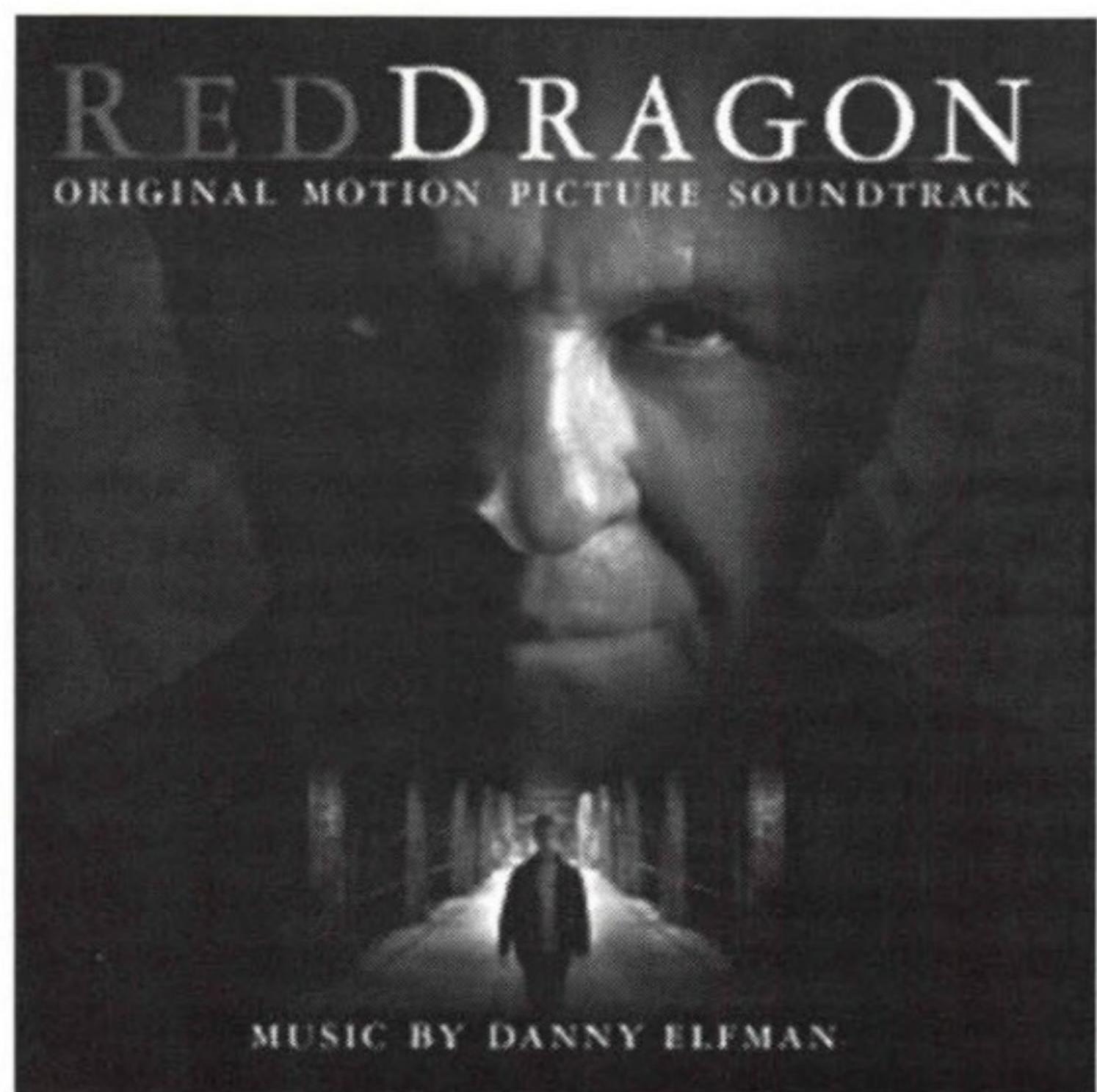


content: a film trailer, a "Making of the Score" video, a music video, screensavers, buddy icons, and access to one of ten online trading cards.

A limited edition is also available (list price \$29.98) in a gold-embossed blue leatherette digipak with fold-out panels and a 20-page booklet. This disc contains a bonus vocal track, "Farewell to Lorien," from the extended DVD version of **THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING**, as well as an image gallery, lyrics and poems, and access to two online trading cards. Finally, true enthusiasts will want to seek out the "Internet Limited Edition," available only from AOL Time Warner for \$29.98, which is identical to the retail limited edition but includes all five printed character cards.

For more information—and to order the internet-only edition—visit lordoftherings-soundtrack.com.

Another film trilogy—this one based on the Hannibal Lecter novels of Thomas Harris—found its dubious completion in **RED DRAGON**, the ill-conceived remake of **MANHUNTER** as a prequel to **THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS**. Howard Shore and Hans Zimmer, who provided exceptional music for **SILENCE** and **HANNIBAL**, respectively, apparently had better things to do; the scoring assignment went to Danny Elfman, who had delivered electrifying epic cues that were the sole virtue of another miscalculated remake, **PLANET OF THE APES**. But Elfman's music for **RED DRAGON** (Decca 289 473 248-2 ST01, \$18.99, 17 tracks, 57m 15s) is surprisingly lame: a by-the-numbers suspense score so generic that they might as well have used stock cues. This disc merely confirms the power of Michael Mann's song selections for **MANHUNTER**, which is one of the better—if not the best—compilation scores of all time.



The enhanced CD of **RED DRAGON** includes interviews with Elfman, Anthony Hopkins, and director Brett Ratner, as well as a photo gallery and a trailer. Additional information is available at universalclassics.com and reddragonmovie.com.

Requiem Revisited

Attentive listeners may have noted that Howard Shore's music was missing from a major trailer for **THE TWO TOWERS**—which instead featured a cue from **REQUIEM FOR A DREAM**, the breakthrough score by former Pop Will Eat Itself frontman Clint Mansell. Performed by Mansell and The Kronos Quartet—and undoubtedly one of the better scores of 2001—**REQUIEM** has been honored in **REQUIEM REMIXED** (Thrive 90703-2, \$17.99, 20 tracks, 76m 21s), in which an array of studio and DJ talents deconstruct and reinvent Mansell's themes.

The disc underscores the good, the bad, and the ugly of the remix mentality. Plant's take on Mansell's main title does little more than add a disco beat, and Josh Wink's "Full Tension" is an 8m-plus exercise in knob-twiddling; but these lesser moments are overcome by compelling contributions from the likes of remix superstar Paul Oakenfold and Delerium (aka Bill Leeb and Rhys Fuller). Also included is Mansell's vocal version of "Ghosts." Fans of electronica—and of the original score—will definitely want to seek this one out.

Mansell's latest score on CD is **ABANDON** (Silverline 281120-2, \$18.99, 27 tracks, 49m 40s), whose opening theme is a paean to the gasping lullabies of Ennio Morricone's *giallo* scores—with vocals by the film's star, Katie Holmes. The music then ventures deep into the ambient.



Reminiscent of Brian Eno's early instrumental experiments, these subdued and subtle atmospheres test the boundaries of conventional film accompaniment, whether orchestral or electronic: brief (on average less than two minutes in length), insistently minimalist, hypnotic. With but a handful of screen credits, Mansell has quickly established himself as a composer to be reckoned with.

For more about Clint Mansell and these discs, check out clintatthecontrols.com, thrivemusic.com, and abandonmovie.com.

Fire Power

Those whose tastes in film music demand more aggressive compositions and arrangements will want to sample a true sleeper that proves one of the finer militaristic scores in recent memory. **REIGN OF FIRE** (Varese Sarabande 302 066 374 2, \$18.99, 14 tracks, 50m 38s) is a revelation from Edward Shearmur (**CRUEL INTENTIONS**, **CHARLIE'S ANGELS**, **K-PAX**, **THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO**) that plays better on its own than on screen, where some of its power was lost in the mix. A full-throttle orchestral assault juiced with electronica, this music is stirring and stylish, with combative cues that will enliven listeners who admire James Horner's **ALIENS** or Brad Fiedel's **TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY**. Slap on your Kevlar vest and visit reignoffire.com or varesesarabande.com for further details.

Review materials should be sent c/o One Eyed Dog, PO Box 27305, Washington DC 20038. The Audio Watchdog is on-line at OnEyeDog@aol.com.

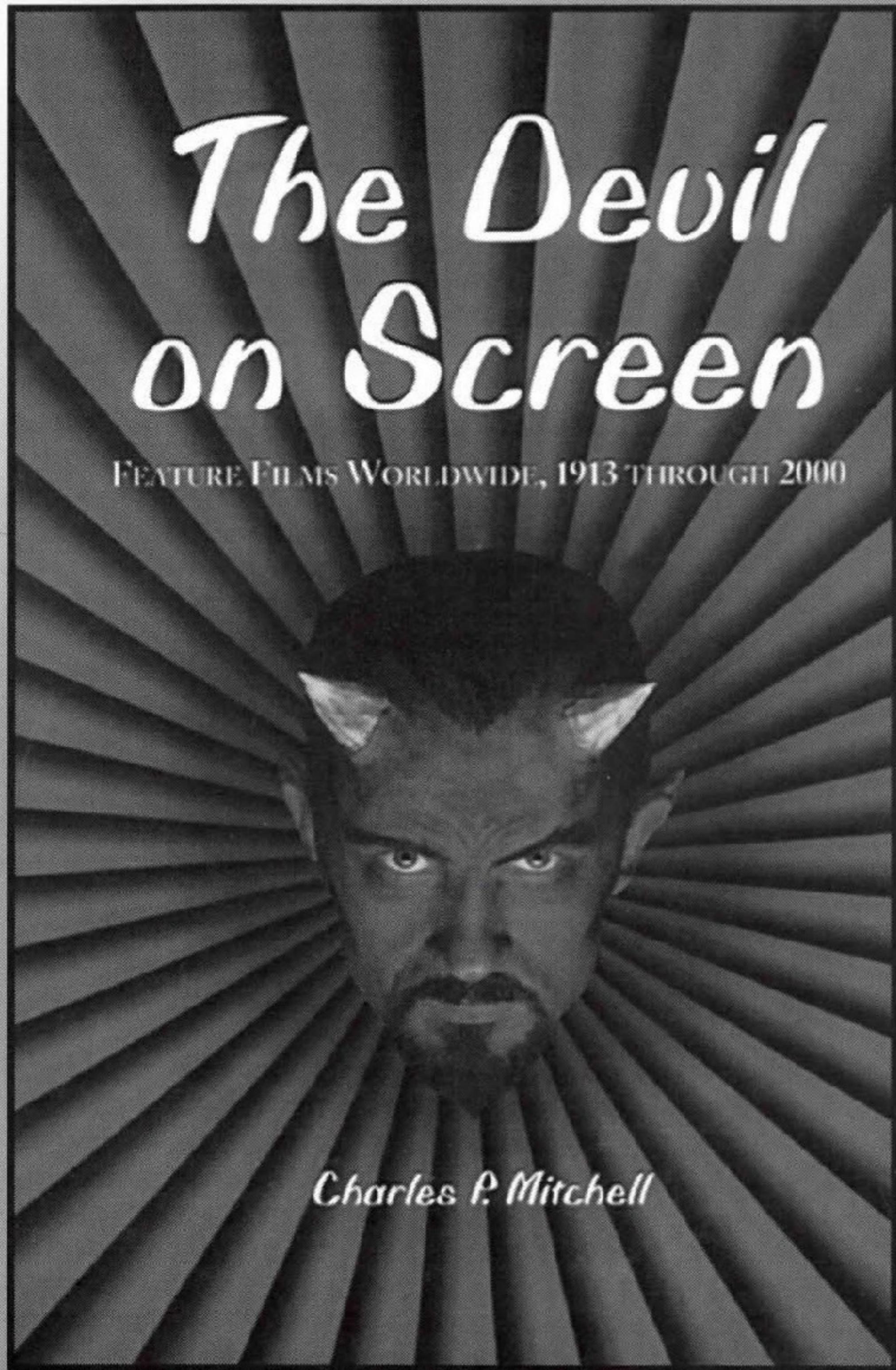


BIBLIO WATCHDOG

THE DEVIL ON SCREEN

FEATURE FILMS WORLDWIDE, 1913 THROUGH 2000

Reviews by Richard Harland Smith



By Charles P. Mitchell

McFarland & Co.

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Jefferson NC 28640

800-253-2187

www.mcfarlandpub.com

344pp., \$53.95 ppd. Hardcover

Given such a title, it is inevitable that the author will at some point apply the familiar phrase "the Devil is in the details"—and with Charles P. Mitchell's *THE DEVIL ON SCREEN*, pop goes the weasel as early as Page 3. No complaints, though. In rendering critical analysis of a selection of theatrical and made-for-TV films in which the Devil plays a significant role, Mitchell (a professional librarian, FILM-FAX contributor, and co-author of the McFarland book *SCREEN SIRENS SCREAM! INTERVIEWS WITH 20 ACTRESSES FROM SCIENCE FICTION, HORROR, FILM NOIR AND MYSTERY MOVIES, 1930s TO 1960s*) takes the time to define his terms: only feature films are considered and only those in which the Devil is an identifiable character, is actually Satan himself, and is played by a recognizable person. Porno films are excluded and the

title must exist in some form of ready availability. 95 films make Mitchell's cut, and for each the author provides technical and actor credits, plot synopsis, and critical appraisal of both the production and its depiction of His Satanic Majesty, with a star rating applied not for overall quality, but to the film's significance as a Devil film.

Laid out alphabetically, Mitchell's selected titles comprise an eclectic cross section ranging from Alan Parker's gruesome **ANGEL HEART** and Robert Fuest's enjoyably camp **THE DEVIL'S RAIN** to more lighthearted fare along the lines of **BEDAZZLED** (both versions), **HEAVEN CAN WAIT** (the Ernst Lubitsch farce, starring Laird Cregar as you-know-who) and the Adam Sandler comedy **LITTLE NICKY** (with Harvey Keitel as the original bad lieutenant). Mitchell has clearly devoted considerable time (and more than a little bit of money) to his study, tracking down seldom discussed foreign films (René Clair's **La Beauté du Diable** and Maurice Tourneur's **La Main du Diable**, released in the States as **THE DEVIL'S HAND**) and now obscure TV movies (**THE DEVIL'S DAUGHTER**, **HAUNTS OF THE VERY RICH**, Wes Craven's **INVITATION TO HELL**, and **SATAN'S SCHOOL FOR GIRLS**, in which Pamela Franklin arouses the ire of Roy Thinnes' internal invader). Trust a librarian to be able to identify every piece of Scripture, every work of fine art and every piece of classical music shanghaied for use in a Devil film—and to note that the transformed Ernest Borgnine of **THE DEVIL'S RAIN** is more ram than goat. Throughout, Mitchell proves himself an informed and gracious tour guide, appreciating high art and low culture with equal acuity, be it the Richard Burton vanity project **DOCTOR FAUSTUS**, the Arnold Schwarzenegger extravaganza **END OF DAYS**, Fred Olen Ray's **WITCH ACADEMY** (with a dyspeptic Robert Vaughn as Lucifer) or Benito Alazraki's Mexican morality play **Espiritismo**, released north of the border by K. Gordon Murray as **SPIRITISM**.

One could, of course, quibble. Mitchell's system of star ratings will confuse more readers than it will assist and could easily have been dropped from the mix. Some synopses run too long—and none more numbingly than his first, for John Farrow's **ALIAS NICK BEAL**. (The author's brusque recap of Ismael Rodriguez's "rock-bottom awful" **Autopsia de un Fantasma** is far more concise, ironically

rendering the synopsis of a film he *dislikes* as more reader-friendly.) Generally, Mitchell's writing is of high caliber, but he leans too heavily on the adjective "masterful" and it hurts like hell when he defaults to hoary clichés such as "one fell swoop" and "spitting image." It's nice that the author includes in his discussion Mario Bava's **LISA AND THE DEVIL**, Jean Brismee's **THE DEVIL'S NIGHT-MARE** and Paul Naschy's **HOWL OF THE DEVIL**, but Euro-Cult is clearly not Mitchell's forte; he neglects Naschy's previous appearance as the Devil in Carlos Aurel's **VENGEANCE OF THE ZOMBIES** and misidentifies both the setting of **LISA AND THE DEVIL**'s opening scene, as well as the characters played by Eduardo Fajardo and Espartaco Santoni. In quoting movie Devil Gabriel Byrne's **END OF DAYS** line, "Satan's greatest trick was convincing man [that] he didn't exist," Mitchell should have mentioned that both Byrne and nearly the same line were used (both to better effect) four years earlier in Bryan Singer's **THE USUAL SUSPECTS**, whose omnipresent villain is believed to be the Devil himself.

Given the breadth of Mitchell's research and the generosity of his critical acumen, however, all of these sins can easily be forgiven. Sturdily bound, handsomely assembled (with perhaps fewer illustrations than one would hope for) and graced with an eye-catching cover illustration of a horned Satan, **THE DEVIL ON SCREEN** will attract some readers who would rather read about Tim Curry's diabolic pop-up in Ridley Scott's **LEGEND** (referenced, but not discussed) than Ray Walston's in **DAMN YANKEES** or George Burns' in **OH, GOD! YOU DEVIL**. Happily, Mitchell has included analyses of many conventional horror films, including John Carpenter's **PRINCE OF DARKNESS**, the Amicus anthologies **TORTURE GARDEN** and **TALES FROM THE CRYPT**, Michael Winner's **THE SENTINEL**, the telefilm **SATAN'S TRIANGLE**, Philip Setbon's neglected **MR. FROST** and Roman Polanski's recent **THE NINTH GATE**, which should help mollify the black T-shirt crowd. Mitchell also includes appendices for "Lost, Obscure and Arcane Devil Films" and for "Television Devils," citing Satan's memorable manifestations on episodes of **DARK SHADOWS**, **THRILLER**, **THE TWILIGHT ZONE** (the unforgettable "The Howling Man") and, believe it or not, **MAKE ROOM FOR DADDY**.

**GOING TO PIECES:
THE RISE AND FALL
OF THE SLASHER FILM,
1978-1986**

By Adam Rockoff

McFarland & Co.

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Jefferson NC 28640

800-253-2187

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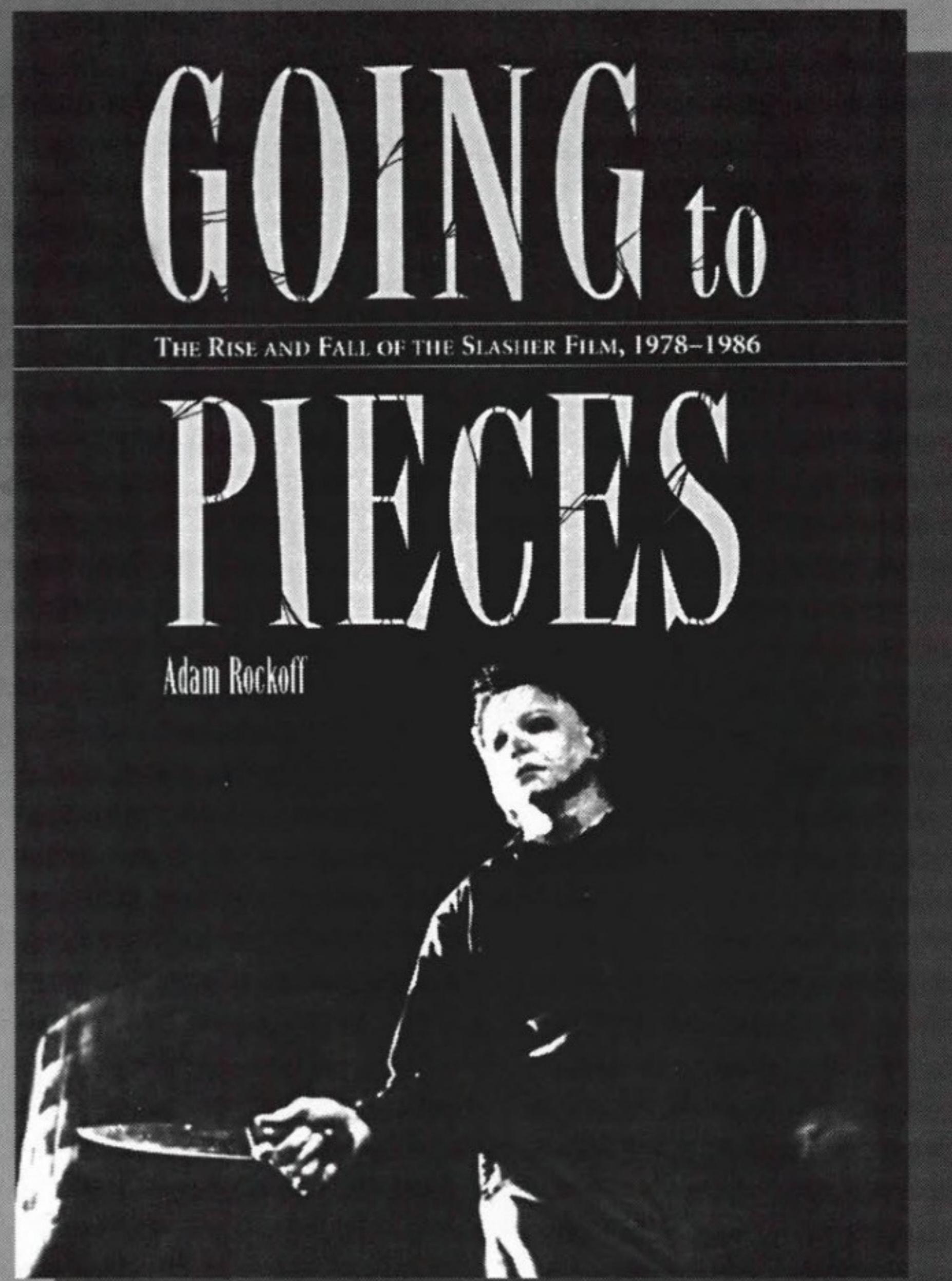
223pp., \$43.95 ppd. Hardcover

Slasher films, those loveless redheaded stepchildren of the horror genre, are the subject of this new book from McFarland and Co. Heirs to the stylish and violent Italian *gialli* inaugurated by Mario Bava's **BLOOD AND BLACK LACE** and franchised by Dario Argento's **THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE** (while boasting a bloodline traceable to Alfred Hitchcock's **PSYCHO** and Michael Powell's **PEEPING TOM**), slashers were a sophomoric response to the straight-faced spooks of **THE EXORCIST** and **THE OMEN**. Put on the map by the surprise success of John Carpenter's **HALLOWEEN** in 1978 and Sean Cunningham's **FRIDAY THE 13TH** two years later, the youth-oriented slasher films changed the face of horror for nearly a decade. The critically denigrated subgenre (legitimized by the huge profits of Wes Craven's **SCREAM**, its imitators, sequels and spoofs) is certainly deserving of a comprehensive history of its birth as an independent initiative, false death as a depleted cash cow and shock resurrection as a Hollywood blockbuster. If only GOING TO PIECES were that book.

To be sure, GOING TO PIECES will find an audience among slasher fans eager to read anything related to the subject. Author Adam Rockoff offers a concise history of the subgenre's evolution, roots, growth and expansion. Additionally, Rockoff has spoken with several key figures from this period; to his credit, he cites his sources and provides a critical bibliography of works from which he has drawn information. To place the slasher film in a wider historical perspective, Rockoff reaches back to the Roman Circus Circus, to

the persecution of alleged witches in Europe, to the French Reign of Terror and the gross-out spectacles of Paris' Théâtre du Grand Guignol as evidence that "Mankind's appetite for violence is as old as mankind itself." Readers who find this particular observation a bit facile will balk at many of the author's sweeping critical and historical asides. While Rockoff has an assured grasp of the slasher film's Big Picture, his arguments are too often undone by his breezy handling of the pertinent details, rendering GOING TO PIECES a dubious critical history distinguished more by attitude than aptitude.

Defining the bloody *gialli* by way of illuminating slasher "pre-history," Rockoff cites Italy as an unlikely nexus for a horror boom because "a generation of Neorealism had left the impression that the Italians were too preoccupied with post-war strife and documentary-style dramas to indulge in the fantastical pleasures of horror." This gross overstatement is typical of the book's superficial scholar-



ship (whose “impression” was this? Critics knew that Neorealism, however influential, represented only a tiny percentage of Italian-made films and Middle America didn’t care one way or the other). The author stumbles again in referring to Dario Argento as a “protégé” of Mario Bava (if Argento was a protégé to anyone, it was Sergio Leone) and his hazy history has **BOOGEYMAN** director Ulli Lommel being the “teenage star” of Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s **CHINESE ROULETTE**, though Lommel was in his 30s by 1976 and had already directed several films (including the infamous **TENDERNESS OF THE WOLVES**). Incorrectly identifying William Hurt (rather than John) as the first victim of Ridley Scott’s **ALIEN**, Rockoff attributes similarities shared by **HALLOWEEN** and **ALIEN** as merely indicative of “the conventions of the slasher film [being] firmly in place,” ignoring the common denominator of scenarist Dan O’Bannon, who imported into his **ALIEN** screenplay key plot points carried over from his screenplay for the sci-fi comedy **DARK STAR**, John Carpenter’s 1974 feature film début.

Elsewhere, Rockoff’s critical remarks hint that he has not seen (or retains only fuzzy memories of) certain titles he fobs off as unrelated. While dedicating a paragraph to Abel Ferrara’s distaff revenge drama **MS. 45** (which he readily admits “is not a slasher film”), he neglects Ferrara’s 1985 follow-up **FEAR CITY**, whose killer-on-the-loose scenario more closely fits the profile. Analyzing the career of Brian De Palma, Rockoff considers **SISTERS** expressly gialloesque but regards the later **DRESSED TO KILL** and **BLOW OUT** as informed more by the slasher cycle than by the Italian model—even though these films lift specific visual and narrative tropes directly from Giuliano Carnimeo’s **THE CASE OF THE BLOODY IRIS** [*Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer?*, 1972] and Michelangelo Antonioni’s **BLOW-UP** (1966). A clumsy pontificator, Rockoff proclaims William Lustig’s **MANIAC** as “the film that **TAXI DRIVER**... didn’t have the guts to be,” but offers no clarification to make his case. Running down the **PSYCHO** sequels, the author notes—somewhat vaguely—that **PSYCHO II** director Richard Franklin’s earlier **ROAD GAMES** “has been called Hitchcockian by some” (emphasis added). He also needs to learn what “ironically” actually means; that actress Celine Lomez quit the

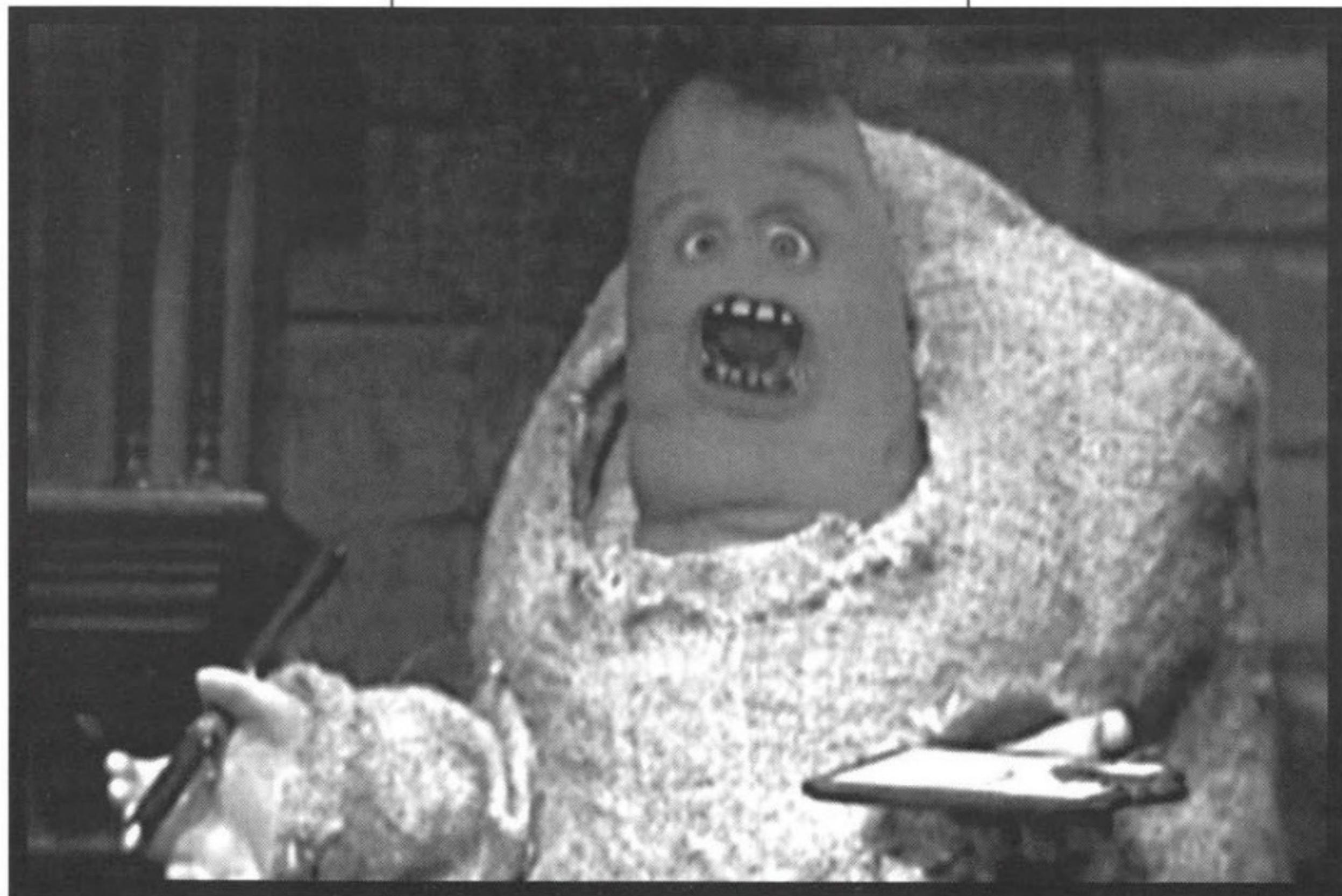
cast of Jonathan Stryker’s **CURTAINS** rather than perform nude, only to see the finished film unreel devoid of any nudity, is not ironic—it’s just what happened.

GOING TO PIECES seems essentially misconceived. Ostensibly aimed at horror fans pre-sold on slashers, Rockoff nonetheless spends the whole of his first chapter (“What Is a Slasher Film”) meticulously defining familiar terms and territory, which gets the book off to a slow, didactic start not helped in the least by glib authorial swipes at “the power elite” and “the ultra-conservative English press,” which make the book read too often like a chuffed fanboy rant. Even the insider information Rockoff gleaned from personal interviews with slasher film directors too frequently comes off as banal and forced. William Lustig is characterized as “one of the most affable, genuinely funny and generous directors in the business,” while **PROM NIGHT** director Paul Lynch is profiled as “one of the most energetic, upbeat and modest directors in the business”—hardly the sort of insight that will get **GOING TO PIECES** pulled down from the shelf time after time as a reference. And what is one to make of Rockoff’s assertion, in his evaluation of **I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER**, that “Jennifer Love Hewitt has never been better”?

Ultimately, something galls about Rockoff begging off an obligation to supply “an exhaustive study of every slasher film ever made.” Surely, such an undertaking would not be the “Herculean task” that Rockoff imagines, as the number of English language slasher films made between 1978 and 1986 is finite, and probably in the low hundreds. The authors of several recent books have gone the distance for their pet subjects. Steve Fentone’s massive **ANTICRISTO: THE BIBLE OF NASTY NUN SINEMA & CULTURE** [reviewed VW 79:74] and John Charles’ **THE HONG KONG FILMOGRAPHY 1977-1997** (a collection of 1,100 reviews) both took the better part of a decade to write, but are essential texts because of their authors’ tenacity. It’s not as if the world were champing at the bit for an admittedly incomplete history of slasher films, without even a select filmography of discussed titles, from a so-called slasher aficionado who has yet to learn that Tobe Hooper’s 1974 cannibal masterpiece is called **THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE**, not **THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE**.



THE LETTERBOX



THE BISSETTE REPORT

An interesting correction of your video update on Joe Dante's "Fleapit" review of **WEREWOLVES ON WHEELS**:

This title has recently been resurrected on VHS, however briefly. Anchor Bay Entertainment presented a restored new transfer (of a still-murky film) as part of their three-tin "boxed set" series of biker movies, **THE GOLDEN AGE OF LEATHER**. Each tin sports two VHS biker films—Vol. 1 (ABE #SV11226): **HELL'S ANGELS '69** and **THE LOSERS**; Vol. 2 (ABE #SV11227): **GIRLS ON THE ROAD** and **WEREWOLVES ON WHEELS**; and Vol. 3 (ABE #SV11228): **HELL'S ANGELS ON WHEELS** and **RUN, ANGEL, RUN!** Each tin is also accompanied by a set of playing cards featuring the respective tin's cover art on the back of the

cards. Very handsome set, but already on final sale via Baker & Taylor and soon out of print—so interested VW readers should track these down now!

Also, regarding the photo illustrating my **LOST WORLD** piece in VW #75:44, this shot is rarer than we thought. That isn't Willis O'Brien in the photo, animating one of **THE LOST WORLD**'s dinosaurs, as my caption says. That's actually assistant animator Joseph L. Roop, who went on to animate the silly saurians for the parody short **THE LOST WHIRL** (1928), also discussed in the article. Confirmation came from Scott MacQueen soon after publication, and should have been corrected sooner. This is the first and only shot of Roop to see print to date, anywhere!

Stephen R. Bissette
Marlboro VT

HAVANA GOOD TIME

I found Richard Harland Smith's review of **CUBAN STORY** [VW 90:47] problematic on several counts. Smith doubts the claim that Errol Flynn and producer Victor Pahlen "grabbed their cameras" to record the Cuban revolution. He goes on to theorize that the filmmakers purchased an existing propaganda film and palmed it off as their own. But Smith fails to mention that Flynn starred in **CUBAN REBEL GIRLS**, a bizarre little opus shot on location at the time of the liberation. Who is to say that Flynn, in between clinches with Beverly Aadland, didn't grab a portable Bolex to capture the bloody conflict—footage that

When **FRANKENTHUMB** star Humpy writes a letter, he can only print. (Thumb print, get it?)

may have found its way into **CUBAN STORY**? Still, it's one thing to question the veracity of the footage; it's quite another to question the man's integrity. Smith is skeptical of Flynn's "adoration" of Castro, but he neglects the fact that the man made two films about revolutionary Cuba. Flynn also wrote a series of syndicated newspaper articles in praise of Castro and his liberation forces. The man may have been wrongheaded, but he was hardly insincere.

Smith makes another error. While he accurately describes the bloated, sweaty Flynn who appears in the on-camera introduction, Smith mistakenly credits Flynn with the subsequent voice-over narration. Truth be told, the narration is performed by an entirely different actor! Indeed, this unnamed voice artist doesn't even attempt to mimic the Tasmanian actor.

At least one of Smith's claims is irrefutable: **CUBAN STORY** is riveting stuff.

Fred Rappaport
Los Angeles CA

Richard Harland Smith responds: "Flynn did star in (but did not write, direct or handle the camera for) **CUBAN**

REBEL GIRLS. While this may indicate to some that Flynn might have turned documentarian during his off-hours (yeah, if I had a 16 year old girlfriend, I know I'd suddenly begin a second career as a DIY filmmaker), but I couldn't make that leap of faith—certainly not with the evidence at hand. I'm no expert on the life or political affiliations of Errol Flynn; I only posed the questions that came to mind about a film bearing Flynn's signature. I'd read several reviews of **CUBAN STORY** that did nothing more than parrot the film's PR: 'Wow, in Cuba in 1959, aging movie star Errol Flynn and his producer pal Victor Pahlen documented the fall of the corrupt Battista regime as rebel leader Fidel Castro swept into power...' To my knowledge, my review is the only one that bothers to question the veracity of this claim. I don't see how any critic worth his sand could fail to be bothered by the unintentional questions that **CUBAN STORY** raises."

CURSES! GOUGED AGAIN!

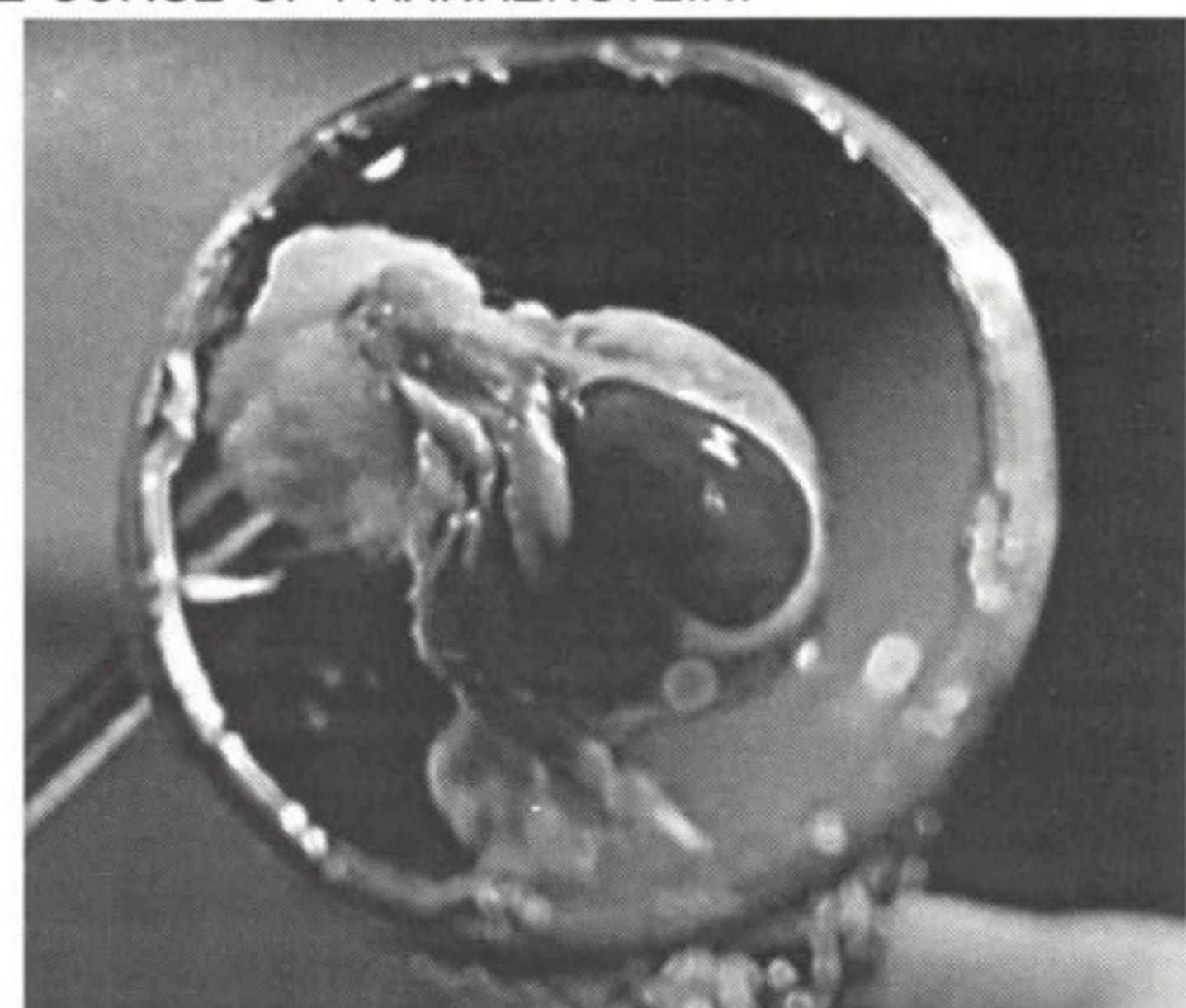
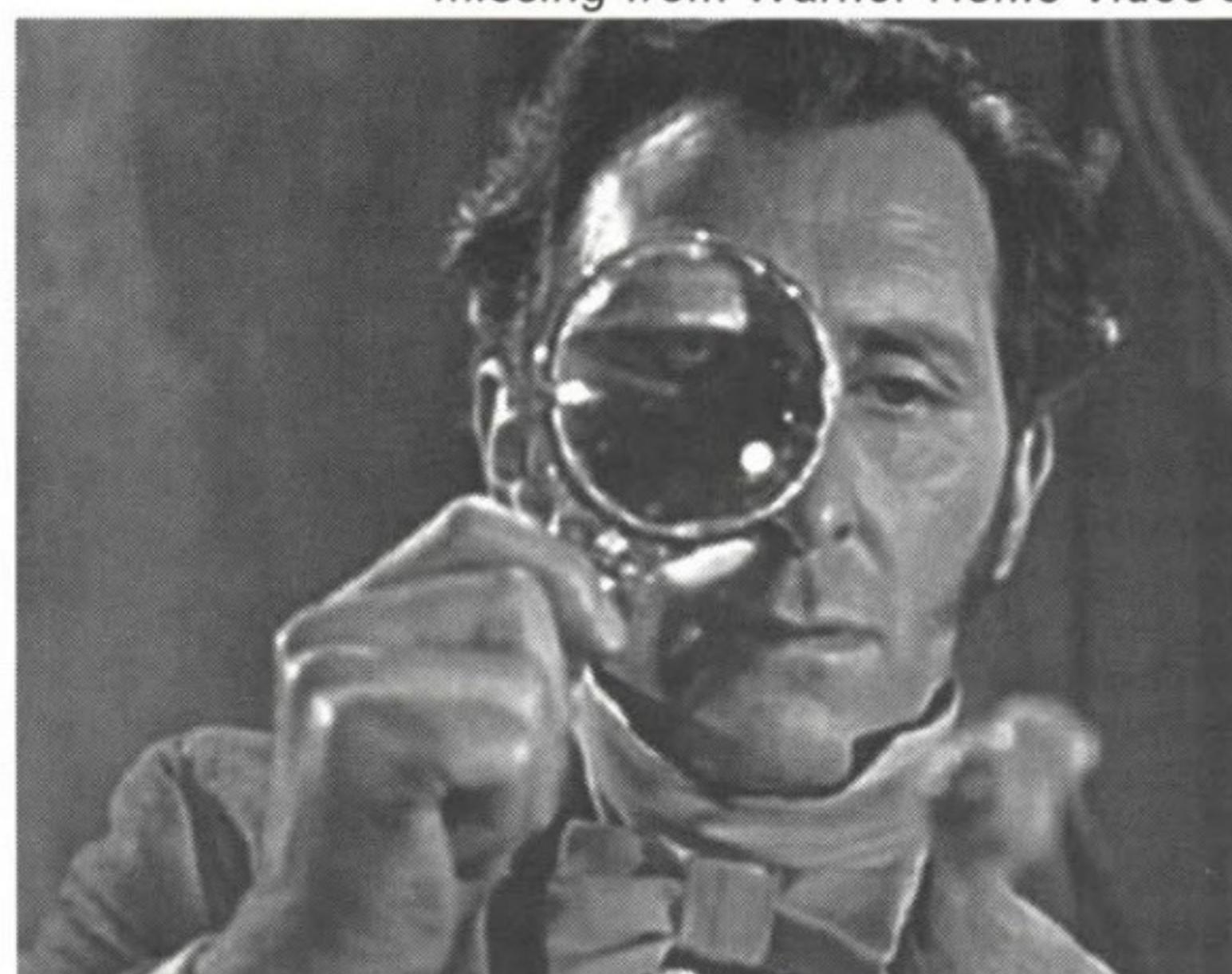
Warner Home Video's DVD of
THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN

has a brief (2s) shot missing from it. This shot, a magnified view of an extracted eyeball, was intact when the film was shown on the BBC, here in the UK, several times in the mid-1990's, although the print was rather bleached and scratchy. It did show a fair bit of vertical info that the DVD has cropped, but the sides are the same. The missing eyeball shot is professionally hidden under a dissolve as Frankenstein pours money onto the counter at the morgue. The TV print dissolves to the eyeball; the DVD to a slowed down clip of the following shot, the famous shot of Baron Frankenstein peering through his magnifying glass. This keeps the image in sync with the soundtrack and makes the running times the same for both prints. The smooth editing suggests that print has always been that way and that it wasn't deliberately censored by Warner Home Video.

I'm aware of at least 3 different edits for the Lucy staking scene in **HORROR OF DRACULA**, but I have no idea which is on the Warner DVD (it was not in my Christmas stocking). Could you have a man look into it?

Dan Gale
Somerset, England

Peter Cushing ogles a baby-blue prop, the latter providing the shot (right) missing from Warner Home Video's **THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN**.



GETTING YOUR DOHLERS WORTH

It's funny to see mention of Don Dohler's **THE ALIEN FACTOR** in the pages of VIDEO WATCHDOG [VW 90:42], because the film touches so close to home.

One day in 1977, I walked into the only comic book shop on the lower east side of Baltimore County, to come face-to-face with a 7-foot-tall brown-furred, bug-eyed alien. Turns out that the shop's owner was helping Don Dohler promote the film's premiere at a local neighborhood movie theater (remember those?) by displaying the empty suit of one of **THE ALIEN FACTOR**'s aliens. (If memory serves, I believe it was called the Zagatile, though this may be the name of the Cockroach beast).

I missed the film's premiere but eventually caught up with it

on television—on CHILLER THEATER, hosted by Count Gore DeVol, broadcast out of Washington, DC—and later on video. I also rented and watched two of Dohler's subsequent efforts: **FIEND**, with Don Liefert as a corpse brought back to life by an alien/supernatural insect-like creature, and **GALAXY BEING**, again with Liefert, cast this time as a villainous drunk held responsible by local police for an alien's bloody rampage. (Digression: In his AURUM/OVERLOOK FILM ENCYCLOPEDIA: HORROR, Phil Hardy misidentifies a picture of Don Liefert in full **FIEND** make-up to illustrate an entry for an early '70s British film of the same name.)

Recently, things came full circle when I had the opportunity to audition for a role as a zombie in an upcoming Don Dohler production.

Vince Sneed
e-mail 

ERRATA

- 90:25 In the cast listing for **PANORAMA BLUE**, we mistook Rick Cassidy as a pseudonym for Rene Bond's companion and frequent co-star, Ric Lutze. Cassidy was in fact a bodybuilder who appeared in both gay and straight porn through the 1970s, most notably in AMG's physique shorts and as Johnny Wadd's sidekick.
- 90:26 **TEENAGE FANTASIES** is available on VHS from Something Weird Video.
- 91:10 Wouldn't you know it? "Tennessee Williams' DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS" was actually written by Eugene O'Neill.
- 91:36 Our review of **THE BLUE ANGEL** noted that Marlene Dietrich had "appeared only in a few theatrical performances" before making it, thus implying it was her first film. This is a myth Dietrich herself perpetuated all her life, but she actually appeared in more than 20 silents in the previous decade, which are listed on the IMDb (www.imdb.net).

Thanks to Les Daniels, Michael Schlesinger, Casey Scott

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